

GREEK
CULTURE
IN THE
ROMAN
WORLD

Miguel John Versluys

Visual Style and Constructing Identity in the Hellenistic World

Nemrud Dağ and Commagene under Antiochos I



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Visual Style and Constructing Identity in the Hellenistic World

Located in the small kingdom of Commagene at the upper Euphrates, the late Hellenistic monument of Nemrud Dağ (c. 50 BC) has been undeservedly neglected by scholars. Qualified as a Greco-Persian hybrid instigated by a lunatic king, this fascinating project of bricolage has been written out of history. This volume redresses that imbalance, interpreting Nemrud Dağ as an attempt at canon building by Antiochos I in order to construct a dynastic ideology and social order, and proving the monument's importance for our understanding of a crucial transitional phase from Hellenistic to Roman. Hellenistic Commagene therefore holds a profound significance for a number of discussions, such as the functioning of Hellenistic *koine* and the genesis of Roman "art," Hellenism and Persianism in antiquity, dynastic propaganda and the power of images, Romanisation in the East, the contextualising of the Augustan cultural revolution, and the role of Greek culture in the Roman world.

MIGUEL JOHN VERSLUYS is Professor of Classical and Mediterranean Archaeology at Leiden University. His research focuses on cultural dynamics in Eurasia in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. He is the author of *Aegyptiaca Romana: Nilotic scenes and the Roman views of Egypt* (Leiden, 2002), co-editor, with Martin Pitts, of *Globalisation and the Roman world: world history, connectivity and material culture* (Cambridge, 2015) and co-editor, with Rolf Strootman, of *Persianism in antiquity* (Stuttgart, 2017).

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MIGUEL JOHN VERSLUYS

Universiteit Leiden, The Netherlands



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“Le savant généralise, l’artiste individualise”

(Jules Renard, *Journal*, 17 janvier 1889)

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Preface

This book has long been in the making.¹ I began working on it during my appointment as a post-doctoral research fellow at the Amsterdam Archaeological Centre from the University of Amsterdam in 2002. I warmly thank the UTOPA Foundation for providing me with this fellowship and in particular its chairman, Loek Dijkman, for his enthusiasm and trust.

Through this appointment I was able to assist professors Herman A.G. Brijder and Eric M. Moormann, directors of the international Nemrud Dağ Project, with their first three campaigns in Commagene in 2001, 2002 and 2003.² This book could not have been written without my involvement in their project and my long stays at Commagene during that time. The ideas expressed in this study took shape during those years, and many project members introduced additional points of research by providing information, criticism or practical support. In particular, I would like to thank Herman Brijder, Eric Moormann, Onno van Nijf, Marlies Schipperheijn, Tesse Stek, Ellen Thiermann and Juriaan Venneman, as well as Maurice Crijns and Anne ten Brink from the International Nemrud Foundation. Doing fieldwork in Commagene has been an unforgettable experience, and my participation would not have been possible without the support from many people in Turkey and, in particular, those of the province of Adıyaman. I would like to thank them all, and in particular Fehmi Eraslan, director of the Adıyaman Museum, who facilitated an in-depth study of the relief fragments from Nemrud Dağ; the various guards from the site of Nemrud Dağ coming from the nearby village of Horik; and my friends Nurhan Turan (Ankara) and Hayder Turanlı (Kahta).

In 2004 I took up a lectureship at the Faculty of Archaeology from Leiden University and was forced to end my involvement with the Nemrud Dağ Project. I was fortunate, however, to be able to extend my

¹ Short summaries of the main argument have been published as *Versluys 2014b* and *2014c*.

² The final publication of that project is now available in *Brijder*. The first three campaigns (2001–2003) had already been published in interim reports by E.M. Moormann and myself: *Nemrud Dağ Project 1*; *Nemrud Dağ Project 2*; and *Nemrud Dağ Project 3*.

research fellowship, which I combined with my Leiden responsibilities, until the end of 2008. Thanks to a sabbatical and an invitation from the Netherlands Institute in Turkey (NIT) director, Fokke Gerritsen, a first draft of this text was finished during my stay there in 2010. My manuscript was brought to the attention of the editors of the *Greek culture in the Roman world* series from Cambridge University Press. It was an excellent idea of the series editors, in particular Jaś Elsner, to suggest that I expand and further ameliorate the manuscript; I can only apologise that it took me so long to properly do that.

However, the long genesis of this book also gave me the opportunity to investigate some of my key concerns from a more general perspective as well as in cooperation with other scholars elsewhere. The shift from inter- to intra-cultural connectivity that I propose in [Chapter 1](#) is extensively debated in *Globalisation and the Roman world: world history, connectivity and material culture*.³ In addition, the emphasis on the impact of objects from that perspective, which goes beyond issues of representation, is central to our *Handbook of archaeology and globalisation*.⁴ The importance and feasibility of memory construction and legitimation for our period, which are both crucial concepts in [Chapter 3](#), are similarly and more widely explored in the volume *Reinventing 'The invention of tradition'?*⁵ Finally, the concept of Persianism, which is central to the argument presented in [Chapter 4](#) as well as to my interpretation of Nemrud Dağ and Commagene under Antiochos I, has recently been applied and evaluated by an international group of scholars consisting of Iranists, classicists, archaeologists and historians in the volume *Persianism in antiquity*.⁶ Ideally, therefore, this monograph should be read on par with those four volumes.

Over the past years several colleagues have read the manuscript in one form or another. I would like to sincerely thank Herman Brijder, Eric Moormann, Onno van Nijf, Rolf Strootman and Rolf Tybout for their criticisms and comments. Equally important was the critique of (in total) five anonymous reviewers for Cambridge University Press, from which I profited immensely and learned much. I would like to thank Frederick Naerebout especially here: not only for his corrections of the various manuscripts but also for our many discussions on culture contact in the ancient world, which have shaped and sharpened my ideas. The fact that I could share my thoughts on Antiochos I and Commagene with Michael

³ Pitts/Versluys 2015. ⁴ Hodos et al. 2016; see also Van Eck/Versluys/ter Keurs 2015.

⁵ Boschung/Busch/Versluys 2015. ⁶ Strootman/Versluys 2017.

Blömer from the Forschungsstelle Asia Minor in Münster has been a great stimulus; as have been discussions on the final manuscript with Caroline Van Eck, Tamar Hodos and Bruno Jacobs. The unfailing support for the present book by Jaś Elsner I mention with much pride and gratitude.

Although Herman Brijder has already been mentioned several times above, he deserves a special and final word of thanks. His support has been crucial in acquiring the UTOPA Foundation fellowship that has made this research possible. In subsequent years our ideas about how to approach Nemrud Dağ and late Hellenistic Commagene began to diverge more and more. Still, he continued to support my work and was always willing to provide room for my alternative views. This is certainly not the Nemrud book that he envisioned me writing more than a decade ago, but it still owes much to his support, criticism and patience.

1.1 Between Alexandria, Rome and Antioch

Consider Alexandria around the middle of the first century BC. After the death of Ptolemy XII, also known as New Dionysos, in 51 BC, the Ptolemaic queen-pharaoh Cleopatra VII has just taken over power. With a failing economy, competitive candidates for the throne and an all-decisive but only indirect Roman involvement, the political situation is chaotic. In this rapidly changing world, Cleopatra is dependent on Rome for political and military backing, and during her reign she intelligently secures the support of various key Roman generals, even residing at a villa along the Tiber for a certain time. Simultaneously, Cleopatra (still) is one of the most important Hellenistic monarchs. She thus holds immense cultural prestige and consequently she is compelled to take up Alexander the Great's legacy of ruling a genuine world empire centred on the Near East and so becoming the King of Kings.¹ She is also, and probably first and foremost, the pharaoh of Egypt. Cleopatra is venerated in temples all across the country as the representative of the gods on earth – Egypt and the cosmos cannot function without her.² Political and social uncertainties do not prevent Egyptian culture from blossoming during the period; Alexandria is still one of the main cultural centres of the Hellenistic world in every respect. “Philosophical eclecticism,” for instance, is further developed and refined in Alexandria during the late Hellenistic period, which Cicero would take to Rome and make into one of his most important legacies.³ Material culture testifies to creative innovation as well. After the careful conservatism of the first Ptolemies – in order to underline continuity with the indigenous Pharaonic past – the development of their royal portraiture is characterised by a range of inventiveness from the second century BC onwards. Egyptian and Greek forms were made into a new idiom, but were

¹ Cf. *Strootman 2010* and, for the functioning of the concept of world empire with Hellenistic monarchs in particular, *Strootman 2013a/b*.

² Recent scholarly literature on Cleopatra includes *Walker 2001*; *Andreae/Rhein 2006*; *Ashton 2008*; *Miles 2011*.

³ Cf. *Steel 2002*. On this Ciceronian strategy in a more general sense, see *Van der Blom 2010*. For eclecticism, see *Epron 1997*.

also used alone or in juxtaposition.⁴ This did not only happen in the great urban metropolis at the Mediterranean coast itself, but also in the hinterland. A portrait from the late Hellenistic period, probably found in the Fayum, illustrates this.⁵ The young boy – perhaps Caesarion – combines the Greek *kausia* and hairstyle with characteristically Egyptian facial features; in this case, it may have been to emphasise the claim that he was the inheritor of Egypt and the Greek East alike. The Alexandrian tombs and their decorations are probably the best extant evidence of the dynamic use of this Egyptian and Greek (and other) visual formula. They likewise demonstrate how the many forms of their intermingling and juxtaposing are a characteristic of society at large and were not confined to the circle of the court alone. Alexandrians seem to have strategically made use of these different elements at their disposal to evoke certain associations. In the third century BC, the tombs and their decorations were distinctly Greek to underline (or suggest) how “Hellenic” Alexandria was (or would like to be).⁶ But only a century or so later the Alexandrians use both Greek and Egyptian architectural and iconographical forms – on their own or in combination – in a sophisticated and subtle manner: a strategy that has been described as cultural interplay.⁷ They did so to achieve specific goals. The Sāqiya tomb, for instance, dating from the second half of the second century BC, witnesses the adoption of Egyptian forms, like the *ba*-bird painted on the façade of a kline-sarcophagus illustrated here, to communicate Greek conceptions of the afterlife. (Fig. 1.1) It therefore shows, to quote Marjorie Venit, “the strength and efficacy of Egyptian decorative and religious tradition as it penetrates a community that envisions itself as ethnically Greek.”⁸ For Alexandria itself papyrological evidence is scarce, but for other places from late Hellenistic Egypt papyrological documents provide us with data on who these actual people were, where they came from and how they perceived their identities. The picture that emerges from these data is confusingly complex for archaeologists and ancient historians.⁹ People with Greek names (Greeks), for instance, can sometimes be identified

⁴ Stanwick 2002, especially Chapters 7 and 8.

⁵ Stanwick 2002, catalogue number E18 (and fig. 178), with interpretation on page 87. For Stanwick, this possible Fayum portrait belongs to what he calls the *mezzo* style, which he considers as typically “provincial.” It was first published in Bianchi 1992.

⁶ For this and what follows I refer to the classic study by Venit (Venit 2002).

⁷ Venit 2002, Chapter 4.

⁸ Venit 2002, 118. The idea that Alexandria was, in cultural respects, a distinctly Greek city with a Greek cityscape that had turned its back to Egypt and its traditions is clearly wrong; see, from a growing bibliography, Ashton 2004 and Savvopoulos 2010.

⁹ For these questions see now Moyer 2011 with all earlier bibliography. For Alexandria itself the Hadra vases provide us with ethnic information on the people buried; cf. Enklaar 1992.



Figure 1.1 Detail of the decoration of the Sāqiya tomb showing a depiction of the *ba*-bird. Alexandria, second half of the second century BC, in situ.

as ethnic Egyptians because they bear their Egyptian names in other documents. Simultaneously, almost all inhabitants from this multi-ethnic port city developed a preference for the Egyptian gods and their visual language whenever the afterlife was concerned.¹⁰ Especially from the first century BC onwards not only the ethnic Egyptians but also the Mediterranean and Near Eastern inhabitants of Alexandria were buried surrounded by Egyptian visual imagery. Around the middle of the first century BC Alexandria must therefore be characterised, in cultural terms, as Egyptian and Greek and Roman and Near Eastern alike, just like Cleopatra VII herself.

Consider Rome around the middle of the first century BC. Through the conquering of Greece and large parts of the Hellenistic East as well as the Roman involvement with Alexandria and Egypt, the city has gradually become an influential centre of Hellenistic culture.¹¹ Greek, Hellenistic, Near Eastern and Egyptian works are brought to Rome as loot, or purchased as collectibles, and there is a fervent discussion on how to deal with all these new influences, how to understand them and how to incorporate them along

¹⁰ Cf. Riggs 2005. ¹¹ Pollitt 1986, Chapter 7.

with Republican traditions.¹² During this period – when, in cultural respects, Roman generals in charge often behave like the Hellenistic monarchs they just had conquered (and are still condemning) – Rome is more part of the wider Hellenistic world than ever before. Similar to Alexandria, there is an enormous dynamic of reception and innovation, of intermingling and juxtaposing. Although Rome had been appropriating and incorporating influences from the wider Mediterranean (mainly Greek) and Italic (mainly Etruscan) world from its very beginnings onwards, clearly there is something rather different going on now in terms of scale and speed. Especially from the period of around 200 BC onwards, Rome is “inundated” with things from the Eastern Mediterranean, especially Greece.¹³ There now are so many objects around, that viewers have to make sense of their historical and cultural significance in relation to one another. In that respect the city indeed is a museum staging the world.¹⁴

The Roman Republic in the first century BC has rightly been characterised, therefore, as having witnessed a cultural explosion.¹⁵ Material culture, in some cases, seems to illustrate these processes quite literally. The statue of a general from the period around 80 BC, found in Tivoli, shows an imposing person with a Roman face and a Greek/Hellenistic body. (Fig. 1.2) Also the so-called Ahenobarbus altar, a large statue base dated around 100–80 BC, juxtaposes what are usually called an Italic/Roman veristic style with a Hellenistic baroque within a single monument.¹⁶ (Figs. 1.3 and 1.4 respectively) During said period these were certainly no anomalies. The shock of so much new brought about cultural anxieties and deep reflections on what it meant to be Roman.¹⁷ One could say, perhaps, that the cultural explosion characterising late Hellenistic Rome consisted of an exploration of and experimentation with the many (Hellenistic) models and styles available at that time in order to arrive at a form of self-definition. This accounts for the literature and (as has already been illustrated by means of Cicero) the philosophy of the time, but it accounts for politics and material culture, too. Rome thus took from the Hellenistic repertoire what it deemed appropriate for its own context and, at the same time, added its own traditions

¹² Cf. Ferrary 1988. ¹³ Pollitt 1978, 155.

¹⁴ Rutledge 2012 for ancient Rome as museum; Östenberg 2009 for triumphal processions as staging the world.

¹⁵ Beard/Crawford 1999, 20–24.

¹⁶ These examples can be found in most handbooks of Roman art as, for instance, Zanker 2007, and are further discussed below in 4.3. For honorific statues like the Tivoli general see now Ma 2013.

¹⁷ Cf. Dench 2005; Farney 2007; Rutledge 2012.

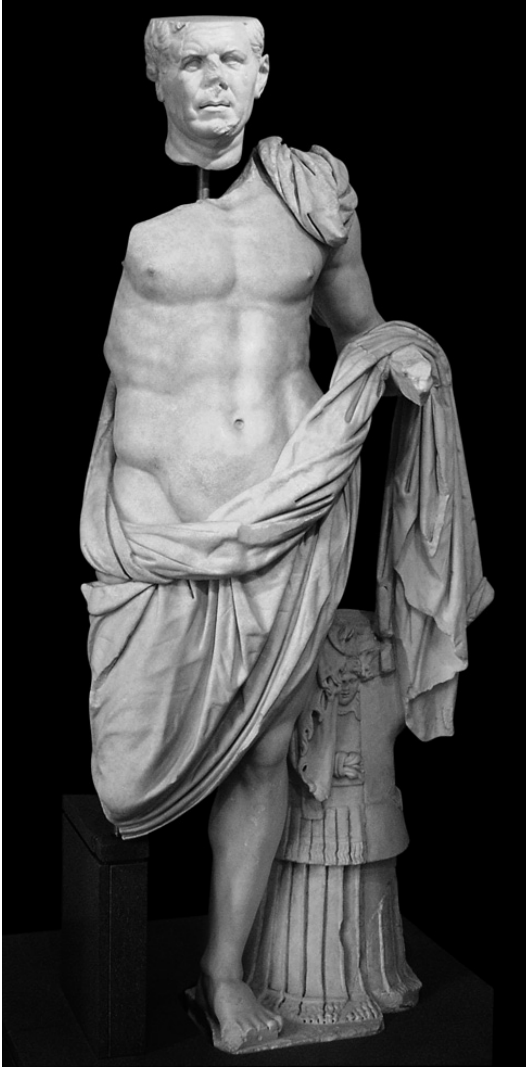


Figure 1.2 Statue of a general, Tivoli, c. 80 BC.

and innovations to that repertoire.¹⁸ As for Alexandria, it seems somewhat naïve to relate all these processes to ethnic or cultural identities in a direct and simplistic way. It has been suggested, for instance, that the use of Roman verism by some Hellenistic kings shows a desire to please the Roman conquerors, but this is difficult to imagine seeing that such

¹⁸ For example, the Italic/Roman tradition of verism that was added to and interacted with similar developments in the Eastern Mediterranean; cf. *Croz 2002*.

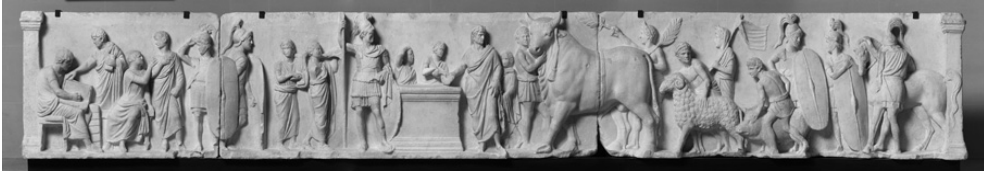


Figure 1.3 Ahenobarbus relief, overview of one of its four sides in an Italic/Roman veristic style, showing the *census* and a sacrifice to Mars, c. 100–80 BC.



Figure 1.4 Ahenobarbus relief, overview of one of the three other sides in a Hellenistic baroque style, showing a marriage procession and sea-creatures, c. 100–80 BC.

verism was as much Hellenistic as it was Roman.¹⁹ Simultaneously, as has been described above, Hellenistic elements could be used in the formation of a Roman identity. Moreover, Rome even located its own Roman past in Anatolian Eastern beginnings.²⁰ Also on the Italian peninsula these dynamic experiments did not solely take place at the centre of power. The Second Style wall paintings from small towns around the Bay of Naples, for instance, testify to similar processes of intermingling and juxtaposing.²¹ Second Style paintings, like the one from the Villa of Oplontis illustrated here, are decorations of upper-class houses that often show architecture and architectural elements. (Fig. 1.5) Although best known from Rome and Pompeii, this so-called Second Style was a general Mediterranean phenomenon that was popular from around 80 to 20 BC. Although they certainly give that impression at first glance, the aim of these paintings was not to imitate real, existing architecture in an illusionistic way. Rather, their designers and painters built new and autonomous forms of decoration from existing components. Forms and materials from all over the Hellenistic world were

¹⁹ Initially suggested in Smith 1988a (and elaborated upon in Smith 1988b) and already criticised for this reason by A. Stewart (Stewart 1990). See now extensively Croz 2002. Kropp 2013, 56, however, follows Smith. “Verism” is the term scholars use to characterise the (over) life-like portrayal in statuary; see Croz 2002, 238–250.

²⁰ Think of the Aeneas legend that located the beginnings of Rome in Troy; cf. Erskine 2001.

²¹ See Tybout 1989; Grüner 2004; and further below in 4.3.



Figure 1.5 Room 15, eastern wall, Villa of Oplontis, Bay of Naples, c. 60–40 BC, in situ.

combined in novel ways to create something that was markedly different from what had been done before. During the first part of the twentieth century – when examples of the Second Style were only known from the Italic peninsula – there was heated debate over the question whether the Second Pompeian style was Roman or had originated from what was then imagined to have been the only cultural capital of the Hellenistic world: Alexandria. Now we know that this was the wrong question to be asking, because the Second Style was both Roman and Alexandrian. Likewise, Rome around the middle of the first century BC must be characterised as being Roman and Greek/Hellenistic alike. Egyptian and Near Eastern elements played a smaller role, be it as constitutive parts of what we describe as Hellenistic or on their own. But in many respects Rome and Alexandria were part of the same cultural context.

Consider Antioch (on-the-Orontes) around the middle of the first century BC. Drawing a circular line from Rome to Alexandria over Anatolia and the Levant, this third metropolis of the late Hellenistic world is situated roughly between the other two.²² Antioch is an important Hellenistic centre as well, although now we know relatively little

²² For *metropoleis* in the ancient world, see Nicolet *et al.* 1999.

about its archaeology.²³ In dynastic and cultural respects the Seleucids choose to strongly underline their membership to the wider Hellenistic world by doing Greek, probably also in their Mediterranean capital. By no means, however, is this an active form of Hellenisation: the cultural and ethnic diversity of the territories under Seleucid rule is very much respected. In Babylon, for instance, another Seleucid capital, the Seleucid kings present themselves as quintessential local, Babylonian successors because, apparently, the context or occasion requires them to do so.²⁴ But in general the Seleucid court uses the Greek cultural formula for dynastic self-presentation. Where the Ptolemies initially felt a need to be conservative in developing new forms of dynastic and cultural expression to stress continuity with Egypt's past, the Seleucids feel free to do so right away. The (limited) evidence available shows that these new forms could be dramatically innovative and are characterised by the intermingling and juxtaposing of various cultural elements. Consider, for example, a personification of the city of Antioch that was probably commissioned by one of the early Seleucid kings.²⁵ It displays a female figure wearing a mural crown who is seated on a rock with her legs crossed, her right foot just touching a male figure below her. (Fig. 1.6) Although the statue seems to look conventionally Greek, it is novel in almost every aspect. The female personification is adorned with a crown in the form of a city wall with towers, an element that obviously belongs to the Anatolian-Cyprian world and that had never been combined in this way before. Also new is the use of topographical references – like the swimming man (representing the Orontes river) and the rock (representing the Silpios mountain at Antioch) – and the dynamic display of a seated woman with crossed legs. In Anatolia and the Levant this new and innovative iconography quickly becomes a successful and much used element of the Hellenistic repertoire. It is difficult to document these kinds of dynamics of reception and innovation on a wider scale and for the entire Hellenistic period due to a lack of

²³ Its half million (or so) people were formally under Roman control for a decade by then; but the Romans were quick to guarantee their autonomy. For the archaeology of Antioch, see still Downey 1961 and 1963, now with the overview of De Giorgi 2016.

²⁴ As can be deduced from the so-called Borsippa cylinder; see Strootman 2013a. For aspects of Hellenisation of Babylon in general, see Kuhrt 2013.

²⁵ Generally known as the Tyche of Antioch; for all information, see now Meyer 2006, the conclusions of which I follow here. The original or other Hellenistic copies have not been preserved; one probably gets the best idea of them through a much later Hadrianic interpretation of the iconography as preserved in the Vatican Museums and illustrated here. For Seleucid Antioch in general, see De Giorgi 2016.



Figure 1.6 The Tyche of Antioch (Hadrianic period, second century AD).

data. Therefore it becomes virtually impossible to present concrete conclusions about the various ethnic and cultural identities involved – as could be done for Alexandria and Rome. As a former Hellenistic Seleucid capital at the Mediterranean coast, Antioch around 50 BC is likely to have shown Greek/Hellenistic and Near Eastern elements in its material culture. It is difficult, however, to be more specific and say something, for instance, about Egyptian (or other) elements or about socio-cultural developments as a consequence of new political circumstances. Did Antioch witness a cultural explosion similar to that in Rome? Did its people make a similar strategic and contextual use of the various Greek, Hellenistic, Egyptian and Near Eastern styles at hand, like they did in Alexandria? We cannot tell. However, similar processes have been well documented for other areas of the Levant in the late Hellenistic period. In the hinterland of Antioch, on a hilltop in the northern Beqa'a Valley, stands the so-called mausoleum of

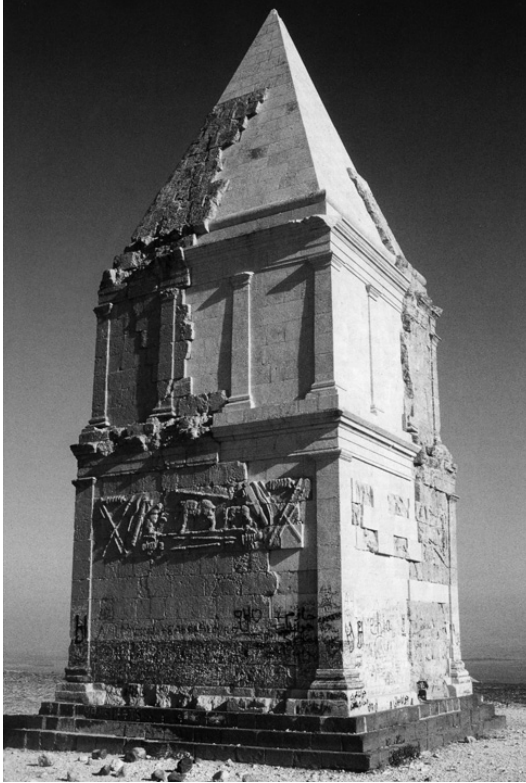


Figure 1.7 Mausoleum of Hermel, Beqa'a Valley, Syria, first century BC, in situ.

Hermel.²⁶ It has a *crepis* with steps and a sort of podium that is decorated with pilasters at the corners, and there are reliefs showing hunted animals on four sides, all hewn from the stone of the hill itself. There is a second layer above, decorated with four pilasters at each side and crowned by a large pyramidal roof. (Fig. 1.7) Again there is a combination of different stylistic elements here that resists an easy interpretation in terms of Greek, Eastern or local.²⁷ This mausoleum is part of a larger

²⁶ Cf. Perdrizet 1938; Freyberger 1998, 18 and 108; Kropp 2013, 212–216. It is dated to the first century BC (see Sartre 2001, 282–283), and it seems difficult to narrow this dating down. The monument is a solid block construction and could not be entered; the burial itself was probably meant to be under the ground (or elsewhere).

²⁷ It is tempting to see in the pyramid roof a reference to the Egyptian style. Although this may certainly be the case, pyramid roofs are used for mausolea probably already from the seventh century BC onwards in the Levant (see Kropp 2010). With this question it is important to note, moreover, that the pyramid form may refer to the concept of *nefesh*, which is the belief that the stone standing on a monument is the resting place of the soul of the deceased (cf. Kropp 2013, 216–224).

group, of which examples can be found everywhere on the circular line that runs from Rome via Antioch to Alexandria and even continues into North Africa, where relatively many examples from the Hellenistic Numidian period have been preserved.²⁸ It is interesting to note that these tombs are all alike in a structural way, but are never similar. As in the case of the Second Pompeian style, it apparently mattered to present something as being as innovative and original as possible. The architecture of Petra is probably the best-known example from the Levant of the dynamic interplay between various styles, iconographies and cultural elements around 50 BC (and beyond); the qualification cultural explosion seems justly applicable to the Nabateans of that period.²⁹ The famous Khazneh, for instance, combines Near Eastern rosettes and Ptolemaic eagles with a Greek temple form, Nabatean tomb-obelisks and the Corinthian order, while the placement of the rotunda, or *tholos*, in the upper storey of the façade is spectacularly original.³⁰ (Fig. 1.8) Late Hellenistic Antioch, its hinterland and large parts of the contemporary Levant, like Petra, are thus very much part of the same cultural *ambiente* as Alexandria and Rome. This certainly was the case for Mark Antony – who was at home both in Rome and Alexandria while he married Cleopatra in Antioch – but certainly not for him alone.

And finally consider Commagene around the middle of the first century BC, the subject of this book. This late Hellenistic kingdom is located at the upper Euphrates, on a very strategic spot between Anatolia on the one side, and the Levant and routes to the Near East on the other. It is not far from the Mediterranean or from Antioch-on-the-Orontes. Commagene is well known for the monument of Nemrud Dağ, where a king called Antiochos I (who ruled between c. 70 and 36 BC) used a visual language for dynastic display that is said to have been characterised by an attempt to integrate Greek and Persian (or Iranian) elements alike. This unique style (as it is often characterised) is equally found in other Commagenean monuments distributed all over the small kingdom. Little is known about the background of this king's dynasty, nor is there much Commagenean archaeology from before the period of Antiochos I. What is certain, however, is the fact that Antiochos I intelligently manoeuvred himself between the political, military and cultural powers of his day:

²⁸ Cf., still, Coarelli/Thébert 1988.

²⁹ Cf. in general Markoe 2003 and, more specifically, McKenzie 1990 and Kropp 2013. Equally illustrative in this respect, probably, are the building projects of Herod the Great, for which see 3.4. For a general picture of the Levantine Near East, cf. Freyberger et al. 2003.

³⁰ Cf. Stewart 2003.

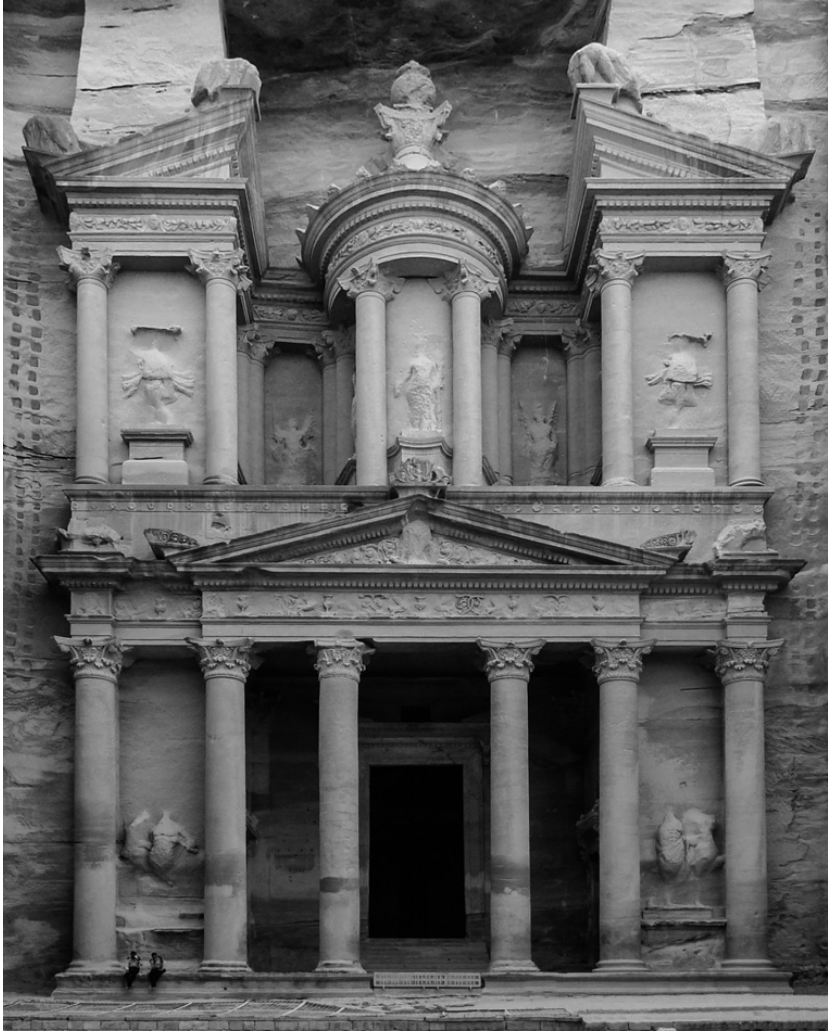


Figure 1.8 Façade of a monumental Hellenistic tomb called the Khazneh, Petra, mid first century BC, in situ.

Tigranes from Armenia (who tried to fill the power vacuum left by the Seleucids in Asia Minor), the Romans, and the Parthians. This state of “being in between” even appears to be Antiochos’ main characteristic: his visual language is Greek *and* Persian/Iranian; in inscriptions he calls himself *philhellen* and *philorhomaïos*; he traces back his ancestry to the Seleucids and Alexander the Great *and* to the Persian King of Kings, Darius; gods to be worshipped at his monuments bear double-names like Zeus *and* Oromasdes, or even Apollo-Mithras-Helios-Hermes. Not only in

terms of intermingling and juxtaposing but also (in comparison to what was there before) in terms of the scale and the number of monuments, Commagene thus appears to have witnessed a similar cultural explosion as Rome did during the period. Scholars are struggling with the question of what this means for Commagenean identities – as they are struggling with the meaning of Alexandrian material culture in terms of relations between style and identity. And similarly, as with the late Hellenistic mausolea such as those of Hermel and Petra, the Antiochan visual language seems to resist any easy definitions in terms of Western versus Eastern. Antiochos I was one of the first so-called friendly kings in the East to acquire Roman recognition, and he could only do so because he was able to position himself in a win-win situation with the Romans.³¹ Comparable to Cleopatra VII, he became Roman, Greek and Near Eastern alike, a point he apparently liked to stress in his self-presentation. As was common for Hellenistic kings, Antiochos I wanted himself and his dynasty to play a role on the larger Hellenistic stage as well: the people of Ephesos, for instance, hailed him as a benefactor for the temple of Artemis, a nodal point in the Hellenistic world.³²

For Commagene, however, scholarly reconstruction is rather different from what has been described above for Alexandria, Rome and Antioch and their respective hinterlands. In an essay from 1993, Martin Robertson concluded on Nemrud Dağ: “and indeed it is marginal to the Hellenistic world, geographically, historically, stylistically.”³³ The absence of Commagene from the *Cambridge companion to the Hellenistic world* (2006) strongly suggests that this is considered common opinion; moreover, Commagene is only mentioned three times in passing in the 2003 *Blackwell companion to the Hellenistic world*. The reason for this neglect becomes apparent when one looks at the judgement reached by the vast majority of scholars when dealing with Antiochos I and his dynastic programme: it is most often described as some sort of paranoia or megalomania taking place in a marginal cultural backwater (such opinions will be further illustrated below).

This book argues for a very different perspective and studies Nemrud Dağ and late Hellenistic Commagene as a fully fledged part of the developments that took place in the Hellenistic world during the formative period of the first century BC. Late Hellenistic Commagene played its own part in the highly interactive network of city-states, kingdoms and

³¹ See Facella 2010.

³² I follow Fraser 1978, 359–360. For this process in general, see Ma 2003a/b and Ma 2013.

³³ Robertson 1993, 67–90; 69.

empires covering large areas of the Mediterranean, Near East and Egypt – and can therefore only be properly understood against the background of what John Ma has called its “language of horizontal relations.”³⁴ In the polycentric and highly interconnected Hellenistic world, Commagene held a natural place between Alexandria and the Delta, Rome and the Bay of Naples, between Antioch, the Beqa’a Valley and Petra, and many other places that belonged to the same cultural *oikumene*. It is this perspective that the current study aims to introduce to other scholars. This perspective will firmly (re)locate Commagene and Nemrud Dağ in its proper (late) Hellenistic context. But it will also, one hopes, give back a key monument to the study of that crucial period of cultural transformation from Hellenistic to Roman, and thus contribute to our understanding of it.

1.2 Understanding Late Hellenistic Commagene

In 1957 Theresa Goell, the main twentieth-century explorer of Nemrud Dağ, published her pioneering campaigns, which took place from 1953 to 1956. (Fig. 1.9) She remarked: “The ‘hierothesion’ had already been located and investigated in 1882 and 1883 and it would be fair to ask why we felt it desirable to re-explore it.”³⁵ The results of her work, which were only published in full by Donald Sanders four decades later in 1996, clearly show how valuable her re-explorations were. This work provided details of the entire site for the first time since its discovery a century earlier, including its statues, inscriptions, sculptural decorations, and surroundings.³⁶ The majority of Commagene had been given better treatment. From Münster, first Friedrich Karl Dörner and then Jörg Wagner devoted their scholarly lives to the region. Their publications, which provided new material and aimed to create a synthesis of the knowledge on the region, are the foundation of Commagenean archaeology. Based on this vast *Kommagene-Forschung*, and on the eventual publication of Goell’s work, the past two decades have seen a proliferation of studies and projects on Nemrud Dağ and Hellenistic and Roman Commagene. In 2000 Wagner compiled an important collection of essays

³⁴ See Ma 2003b, now with Ma 2013. ³⁵ Goell 1957, 7.

³⁶ Goell/Sanders. In general the work of the editor was welcomed, but there was criticism of the content and Goell’s work. See the extensive review in Jacobs 1998b, 344–351. For a short biography of Goell (and her relationship to Nemrud Dağ) see most recently Sanders/Gill 2004; Moormann 2005, 148–153; and Brijder, 298–310. See also the documentary on her life and work called *Queen of the mountain*, made by her niece Martha Goell Lubell in 2006.



Figure 1.9 Theresa Goell, visible at the extreme left side of the picture, overseeing work on the East Terrace during one of her campaigns in the 1950s.

with the results of new research on Commagene.³⁷ The city of Zeugma, once an important Euphrates crossover in Commagenean territory, was the subject of large-scale rescue excavations during that same period, before parts of it became submerged due to the building of the Birecik dam.³⁸ In 2001 an international Nemrud Dağ Project was started, under the aegis of the University of Amsterdam, with the primary aim of conserving and restoring the monument.³⁹ In the same year Münster initiated excavations of the most important sanctuary of Jupiter Dolichenus in his home town of Doliche.⁴⁰ These publications and projects,

³⁷ *Gottkönige am Euphrat*. This book replaced the earlier overviews by Dörner (like Dörner 1971 and 1975a). A second edition of the book was published in 2012.

³⁸ See Chapter 2 sv. Zeugma for a bibliography and, in general, Çakar 1992. For the most recent research, see various contributions to *Kommagenische Forschungen IV* and Aylward 2013. On the awkward relationship between archaeology and the Turkey's Southeast Anatolia Project see Shoup 2006, 231–258.

³⁹ For its results see *Nemrud Dağ Project 1*, *Nemrud Dağ Project 2* and *Nemrud Dağ Project 3*, and now *Brijder*. For its follow-up, see Şahin Güçhan 2011, 309–340.

⁴⁰ For its results see Blömer/Winter 2005 and 2006 as well as various contributions to *Kommagenische Forschungen IV*.

combined with ongoing research by longstanding Commagene scholars, have developed new knowledge and analyses of Nemrud Dağ, Antiochos I and Hellenistic/Roman Commagene, with the works of Margherita Facella, Bruno Jacobs and Engelbert Winter taking pride of place.⁴¹

It would therefore be relevant to ask again, as Goell did in her case, what could be gained from a re-exploration of the topic. This book hopes to contribute new perspectives and questions to the Commagene research in two ways. First, by putting two interlocked subjects – identity and style – as central to the analysis, and second, by means of the approach to the subject. This approach has already been introduced in the [previous section](#): it seeks to understand Nemrud Dağ and late Hellenistic Commagene in a pan-Hellenistic framework “between Alexandria, Rome and Antioch.” This perspective will be elaborated upon somewhat more theoretically and in depth below, in order to further clarify the difference between the present study and most other research on Nemrud Dağ. First, however, it is necessary to explain why the pairing of identity and style has been chosen as the key interpretative terminology for this study.

The site of Nemrud Dağ consists of a tumulus surrounded by two major terraces.⁴² (Fig. 1.10) The tumulus was created by Antiochos I around the middle of the first century BC on a hilltop in the north-eastern part of his small kingdom; it is said to contain his tomb, although it remains as yet undiscovered. Each terrace originally contained more or less the same elements, including a series of five monumental statues (four gods and the king himself, flanked on each side by an eagle-lion pair) as well as series that included *dexiosis* (hand-shake) reliefs and ancestor reliefs. A large inscription in Greek situated at the back of the colossi, generally referred to as the great cult inscription containing a *nomos* (law), provides information on the function of the monument and the intentions of its builder. As has already been mentioned above, in terms of identity and style the monument shows Greek as well as Persian (or Iranian) aspects, as Antiochos I traced his ancestry to both Alexander the Great and Darius, while the deities were “syncretised” denominations. In addition, the king referred to himself not only as *philhellen* but also as *philorhomaïos*. Several elements that are found at Nemrud Dağ (a hilltop sanctuary, colossal

⁴¹ See the bibliography. The recent important volume edited by M. Blömer/A. Lichtenberger/R. Raja, *Religious identities in the Levant from Alexander to Muhammed: continuity and change* (Leuven, 2015), has several important articles on Commagene but appeared too late to take into account.

⁴² Lavishly illustrated and with detailed descriptions, *Brijder* now provides the best introduction to the monument. See further 2.3 below.

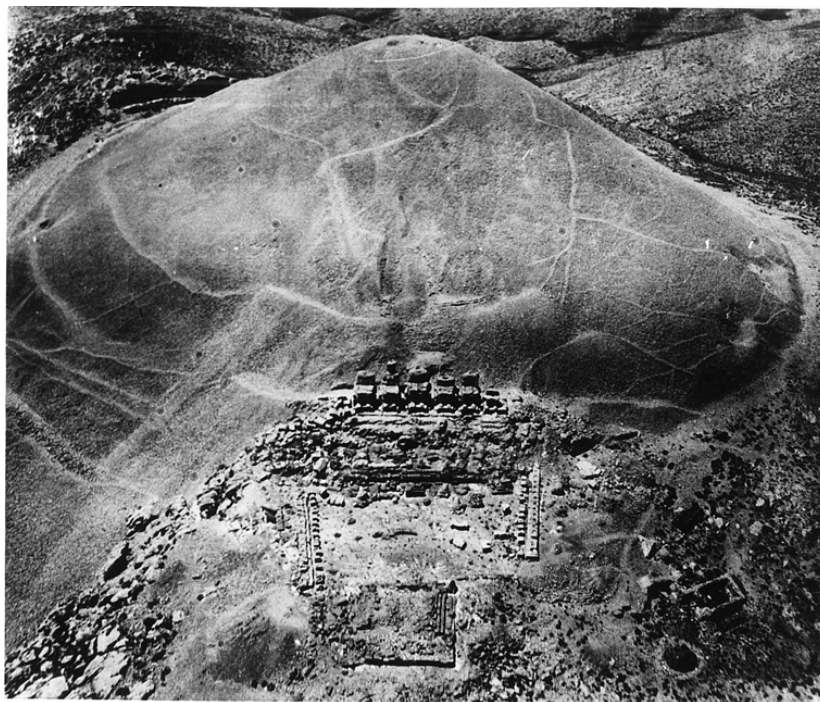


Figure 1.10 Aerial view of Nemrud Dağ: the East Terrace and the tumulus as seen before the campaigns of Theresa Goell in the 1950s.

statues, *dexiosis* reliefs, specific animals, cult inscriptions) recur in other known Commagenean sites, for example Arsameia ad Nymphaeum and Karakuş. (Fig. 1.11) The kingdom's capital, Samosata – and with it large parts of ancient Commagene – is now submerged by the Euphrates due to one of the dams built for the South East Anatolia Project (see below). No Commagenean cities, villages or houses have been excavated, nor has any systematic field survey been carried out.

This brief summary of the sources at our disposal indicates that Antiochos I was apparently well aware of the importance of material culture for disseminating a unified set of symbols throughout his kingdom and that he was actively concerned with self-presentation. This book seeks to develop this view by focusing on *identity*. The interpretation that a monument and its (visual) decoration are related to the legitimization of its builder is obvious. Questions that may provide greater understanding are: Why did Antiochos I choose to display this specific identity for himself and his reign? Who were his models? What was the relationship between the image and the social context wherein it functioned? How was it

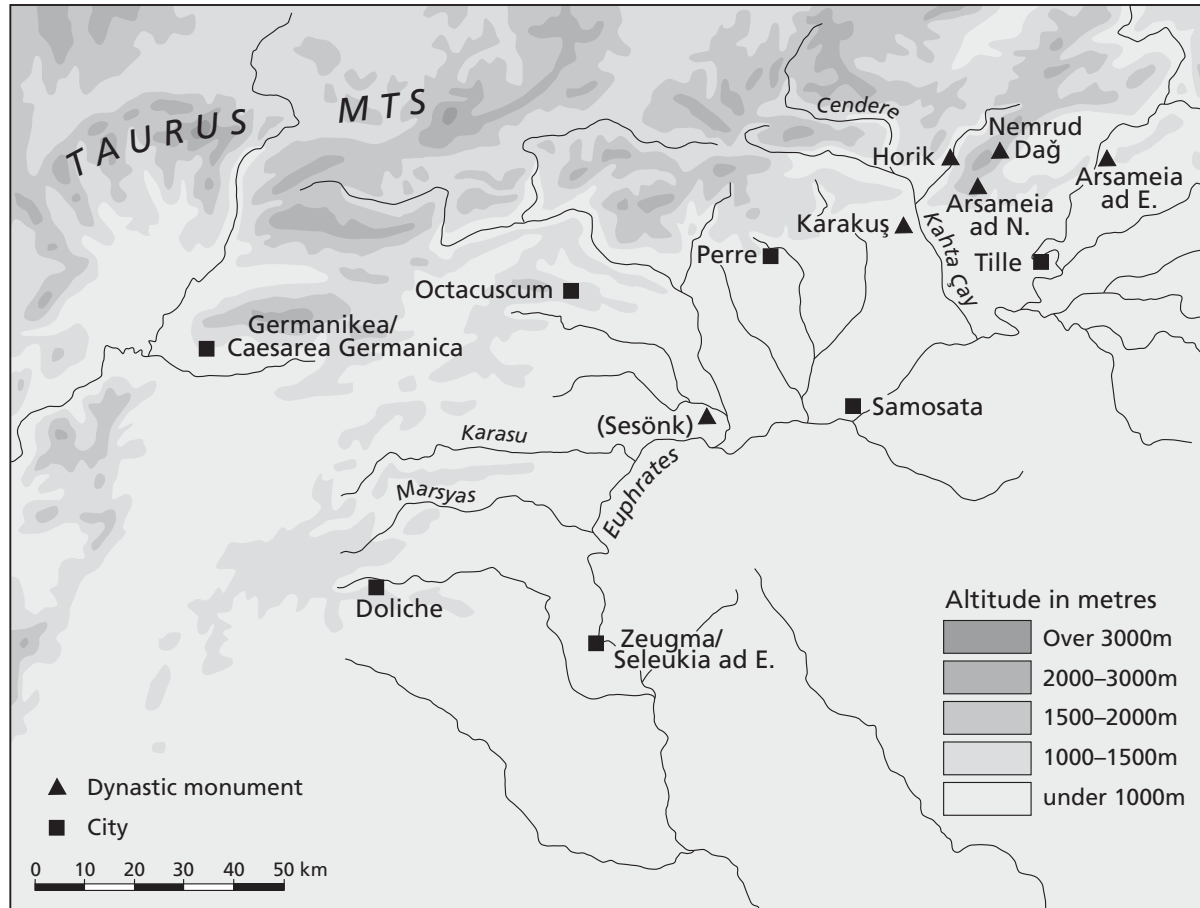


Figure 1.11 Map of Commagene, highlighting major dynastic monuments and cities (drawn after Wagner 2000).

perceived and incorporated into society at large? Where did such a strategy come from? And are there contemporary parallels for it?

The (language of) imagery – *Bildersprache* – that Antiochos I used is remarkable for its employment of what are usually termed Greek and Persian (or Iranian) elements. This style is often described negatively as “hybrid.” The *communis opinio* on this is summarised by a quote from R.R.R. Smith’s conclusion to his *Hellenistic royal portraits*:

Antiochos’ images, then, are a hybrid art designed to express his particular hybrid dynastic ideas . . . The result is a rather hollow, synthetic Greek version of Oriental dynastic art, which perhaps accurately expresses Antiochos’ dynastic vision – though, of course, he would not have seen it like that.⁴³

This work seeks to overcome these negative value judgements by focusing on the concept of *style*.⁴⁴ I do not seek to propose positive value judgements instead, but rather to point out that such judgements do little to explain historical context and material culture.⁴⁵ Questions that should be addressed when analysing the Antiochan style include: How can the visual language that Antiochos I expressed through his monuments be described? What were the origins of this visual style (if it can be designated as such) and the ideas behind it? Are there any contemporary parallels for this visual language? And how does it relate to questions of identity and to the social context of late Hellenistic Commagene?

By making identity and style the principal subjects of the present study, I will try to ask new questions about Nemrud Dağ and the visual style used by Antiochos I. Moreover, I seek to achieve this objective by taking an approach that differs in three ways from most research conducted thus far.

⁴³ Smith 1988a, 104.

⁴⁴ In a similar vein already Hoepfner 1983, 1: “Provinziell und späthellenistisch sind zutreffende Kriterien, abwertend gebraucht versperren sie aber den Blick dafür, daß es sich um eines der kulturhistorisch und politisch interessantesten Phänomene handelt” (“Criteria such as ‘provincial’ and ‘late Hellenistic’ are perfectly suitable; however, when applied derogatively they affect our perception and we easily forget that we are dealing with most interesting cultural-historical and political phenomena”); and idem, 60: “Bei dieser Sachlage geht es nicht an, das Phänomen des kommagenischen Herrscherkultes als die übersteigerte und ichbezogene Idee eines wirklichkeitsfremden Phantasten hinzustellen” (“Considering this situation, it is not acceptable to describe the phenomenon of the ruler cult of Commagene as the exaggerated and self-centred idea of an otherworldly dreamer”). For some historiography on the use of what the French define as *basse époque hellénistique*, see Fröhlich/Müller 2005.

⁴⁵ See Strootman 2007, 316, discussing the scholarly opinions on the Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphos: “According to Peter Green, the ‘ultramontane extravagance’ of the procession foreshadowed the decadence and corruption of the late Ptolemies, but to dismiss the procession as meaningless spendthrift of a megalomaniac monarch is beside the point.” Cf. Strootman 2014, 255.

1.2.1 A Global Hellenistic World

First, as has already become evident, my approach differs from the perceived exceptionality – *Sonderstellung* – of Nemrud Dağ and Antiochan Commagene. Most interpretations (implicitly) suggest that this is “the ugly caprice of a bombastic monarch.”⁴⁶ The qualifications from Robertson and Smith quoted above aptly illustrate this viewpoint (and its consequences).⁴⁷ One could also quote, from a different research tradition, Heinrich Dörrie, who used words such as “frivolous” and “grotesque” as qualifications, and concluded: “In light of the every-day reality of the late Hellenistic world, it seems fully justified to describe the situation as ‘excessive.’”⁴⁸ Also the important recent book by Kropp (2013), while usefully (and quite innovatively, see below) studying Commagene in the context of other major players in the Near East in the period, like the Nabateans, the Hasmoneans, the Itureans and the Herodian dynasty, remarks that: “The kingdom of Kommagene stands out for the exotic and eclectic ruler cult of Antiochos I (-)” that would be “idiosyncratic and far removed from regional trends and traditions.”⁴⁹ Coming with most interpretations, though often implicitly, is a negative judgement in regard to the low degree of “Greekness.”⁵⁰ These interpretations probably resulted in Antiochan Commagene’s frequent treatment

⁴⁶ To use Goell’s phrase, in which she criticised these interpretations: Goell 1957, 9: “In our opinion, the monument, sadly neglected in intervening years as the ugly caprice of a bombastic monarch, contributes uniquely to our knowledge of an obscure area and age.”

⁴⁷ See also the first sentence of R.R.R. Smith’s review of Hoepfner 1983 in *JRS* 75 (1985), 275–277: “Antiochos I of Kommagene suffered probably from both paranoia and megalomania.”

⁴⁸ Dörrie 1978, 245: “So darf das Urteil ‘maßlos’ im Hinblick auf die Realitäten der späthellenistischen Welt als gültig Aufrecht erhalten werden.” Note however that in the remainder of his text he seems to provide more nuance, saying: “Dieser König befindet sich in wesentlichen Punkten in Übereinstimmung mit dem, was gelehrte Männer jener Zeit dachten und aussprachen” (“This King seems to be in accordance with ideas expressed by the learned men of his time”).

⁴⁹ Quotes from: Kropp 2010, 23 and 87. On page 188 Kropp even uses the word “comical” in this context.

⁵⁰ Explicitly is, for example, John Boardman, who mentions Nemrud Dağ twice (Boardman 1994, 80 and 82) in his seminal overview of what he calls “the diffusion of Classical art in Antiquity,” in which he writes (82): “In the west, though close to the fully Hellenistic cities of the East, the Commagene kings celebrated their relationships to Persian deities, in Greek disguise, with statues and reliefs that combine effective oriental formality (for the kings) with a travesty of Classical statuary (for the gods). The creator of the 1st century BC Herakles (-) was unfamiliar with (and probably unsympathetic to) the Classical treatment of nude sculpture, but copied the pose and sketched the anatomy patterns of a Classical figure.” Note that his illustration shows the Herakles *dexiosis* from Arsameia ad Nymphaeum but incorrectly mentions “Relief at Nemrud Dagh.” For his views in general, see the seventeenth J.L. Myres memorial lecture that Boardman held in Oxford in 1993: Boardman 1993. For historiographical contextualisation, see Hauser 2001.

as an exception, as something out of the ordinary and non-representative. As such, the site of Nemrud Dağ and related Commagenean monuments have been detached from their regional and chronological contexts.

More than a decade ago, however, this view was countered by Wolfram Hoepfner, who concluded in what still is a thought-provoking essay: “He [Antiochos I] created one of the culturally most interesting (and most extreme) projects of the late Hellenistic period.”⁵¹ I would like to suggest, in line with and building on Hoepfner’s analysis, that what happened in Antiochan Commagene was in fact not unusual for a late Hellenistic region from that period at all. This is not to say that there are many examples of kings who built 8 m tall statues of Zeus-Oromasdes on top of 2205 metre mountains. But that is not the point in question. It will be argued that Antiochos I intentionally used elements from a Hellenistic repertoire in order to develop a sort of tradition or canon, and this *can* be readily compared to what happened in other regions during that period. My purpose is not a rehabilitation of the king and his project, as Goell appeared to be striving for, but rather to add to the programme of research on Commagene by making it part of a larger context and thus giving it a more significant presence in larger-scale debates. Singling out Commagene as the strange caprice seems to have led many scholars, of course with notable exceptions, to adopt one of two approaches. Scholars who focus on Commagene itself generally do not connect it to the general debates or wider context of Hellenistic and Roman archaeology, while scholars who focus on the general themes or larger issues rarely analyse Nemrud Dağ in depth, but instead regard it as oddity and exception. Rather extreme examples of the latter practice include books that have statues from Nemrud Dağ on their front cover, but only discuss them superficially (or not at all).⁵²

⁵¹ Hoepfner 2000, 73: “Er [Antiochos I] schuf eines der kulturgeschichtlich interessantesten Extremprojekte des Späthellenismus.” See also the quotes from his 1983 publication adduced above in n44. Note also, however, that Hoepfner still uses the qualification “extreme.” Mannzmann’s 1978 article should also be mentioned here; it adduces a lot of theoretical literature on power and politics, before evaluating the Antiochan project positively as an ingenious attempt to secure the role of Commagene within the changing political landscape dominated by the Romans. In a similar vein see also Musti 1982 and Allgöwer 1993, which talk about the “extraordinaire créativité” (“extraordinary creativity”) of the ideological programme (284). Kropp (Kropp 2013, 364) qualifies it as “a bold political-religious experiment.”

⁵² This is also likely to be due to their “uniqueness,” their iconic status as symbols of Turkish archaeological heritage, and the assumption that they provide a stylistic illustration of Anatolia as a bridge between East and West. See, for example, Burney/Marshall Lang 1971, which has the Nemrud Dağ statues prominently on the cover, while in the text Commagene is only mentioned a few times and Nemrud Dağ is not commented upon at all. A recent example is Burkert 2004, which has the western terrace Herakles on its cover. The book is as important as all the other work by Burkert, but only mentions Nemrud Dağ once and in passing.

This book, therefore, takes an approach that explicitly focuses on the wider context, and seeks to understand what happened in Commagene in the first century BC by drawing parallels throughout western and central Eurasia.⁵³ As such, it places itself in a tradition of scholarship that has become particularly prominent (again) over the past decade and that puts the notions of *connectivity* and *shared practices within a single (cultural) milieu* central to its understanding of the ancient world.⁵⁴ Taking inspiration from this approach, the present study argues that in order to reach an interpretation of Commagene as a “micro region” in the first century BC, one has to look at what happened in the wider setting of that micro region, that is the wider Mediterranean as well as the Near East. The importance of this connectivity approach – and of understanding what happened in Commagene as being related to developments in Alexandria, Rome and Antioch as a matter of fact – is strengthened by the period under study. From the period of Alexander the Great onwards, the ancient Mediterranean and Near East witnessed relatively rapid transformations in terms of economic, social, political, ideological and religious culture. There had been connections – and transformations taking place as a result of that connectivity – before. Already in the Bronze Age (some) Mediterranean and Near Eastern elites belonged to a network through which prestige items were exchanged, and scholars have therefore spoken about the “international style” of the Bronze Age.⁵⁵ During the Iron Age this elite, luxury connection was enhanced by more continuous and more numerous circulations of people. In combination with Phoenician and Greek trade, this resulted in common practices all around the Mediterranean and (parts of) the Near East: some scholars even

⁵³ Cf. a remark of S. Kane who, in her review of a book on the Lycian sarcophagus from the royal tombs at Sidon, states that the analysis of that book “underscores the importance of looking at works from ‘fringe’ kingdoms such as Sidon in their total Mediterranean context” (Kane 1986, 488).

⁵⁴ *The corrupting sea* (Horden/Purcell 2000) is often referred to as a recent, programmatic statement of this perspective. In this study, Horden and Purcell argue that the different areas of the Mediterranean cannot be understood unless studied in connection. The Mediterranean derives its unity from the connectivity of its micro regions, so they argue, and therefore these micro regions (or “virtual islands” as they call them) must be understood within their wider setting. They define the Mediterranean as: “The sea, its islands, and the countries that surround it, communicate across it, and share its climate,” and characterise the Mediterranean’s past as “[d]ense fragmentation complemented by a striving towards control of communications” (15 and 25). Their map 1 with the physical definitions of the Mediterranean region shows that Commagene is actually *on* the border of the Mediterranean. Other important recent contributions underlining the importance of a connectivity perspective include Gosden 2004; Van Dommelen/Knapp 2010; Canepa 2010a; Knappett 2011; Malkin 2011; Hahn/Weiss 2012; Pitts/Versluys 2015. On how all this is very important, but not new, see Saunier 2008, 159–180.

⁵⁵ Cf. Knapp 1998 and Feldman 2006.

talk about “the global Mediterranean Iron Age” to indicate the large degree of connectivity at stake.⁵⁶ It was, however, only after the conquests of Alexander the Great that these common practices slowly seem to develop towards something of a single system. However, because no single Hellenistic Empire existed, it was the Roman conquest of the Mediterranean and Near East from circa 200 BC onwards that would play a crucial role with the anchoring of this growing convergence. In a political and military way, the Romans seem to have consolidated the legacy of Alexander. In his *Histories* (1.3), Polybius has famously described this transition as follows:

Now in earlier times the world’s history had consisted, so to speak, of a series of unrelated episodes, the origins and results of each being as widely separated as their localities, but from this point onwards [after the Second Punic war] history becomes an organic whole: the affairs of Italy and Africa are connected with those of Asia and of Greece, and all events bear a relationship and contribute to a single end.

Some scholars, therefore, prefer to understand the *oikumene* from the period of circa 200 BC onwards as a (truly) globalised world.⁵⁷ During this era the Roman Republic (later Empire) would institutionalise the Hellenistic system across the entire known world, resulting in an unparalleled circulation of goods and peoples and common practices.

Be that as it may, it seems a useful point of departure to study the (late) Hellenistic period as a period wherein “the affairs of Italy and Africa are connected with those of Asia and of Greece”; we have already seen in the first part of this introduction that for many people they clearly were. Literary, epigraphic and archaeological sources demonstrate the fact that – especially for kings and elites but certainly not for those groups exclusively – a common Hellenistic world with shared practices indeed existed.⁵⁸ The Hellenistic kingdoms were the successors to the Achaemenid Empire that already had developed some form of centralisation and coherence over its territory; this fact will certainly have played a major role.⁵⁹ Moreover, there was a continuous, almost pandemic warfare between the different Hellenistic states, resulting in frequent conquests and re-conquests of each other’s territories. Of course there certainly was considerable diversity and local diversification

⁵⁶ Cf. Hodos 2009, 221–241 and Hales/Hodos 2010.

⁵⁷ Cf. several articles (with different opinions) in Pitts/Versluys 2015 (in this book the article by E. Isayev deals with the Polybius passage and its implications in detail); in general: Nederveen Pieterse 2012, 1–25.

⁵⁸ Cf. Bertrand 1990; Ma 2003b; Strootman 2007/2014.

⁵⁹ Briant (Briant 1996) has demonstrated the continuity between the Achaemenid and the Hellenistic period in this respect: both are using the same strategies. See also Briant 2003.

in the (late) Hellenistic world, but all these “local” aspects can only be properly understood as part of an overarching, “global” framework.⁶⁰

This study will therefore try to understand developments in Commagene by focusing on its wider Hellenistic (i.e. Mediterranean and Near Eastern) context.⁶¹ Needless to say, it is only possible to apply this wider perspective by building upon the important work that has been completed by others on Commagene itself. The main archaeological sites (Nemrud Dağ, Arsameia ad Nymphaeum) have been published, the epigraphic sources have been edited and discussed (for instance by F.K. Dörner, G. Petzl, S. Şahin and, most recently, C. Crowther),⁶² interpretative questions have been explored (for instance by B. Jacobs and J. Wagner) and a sound and up-to-date historical narrative has just been published by M. Facella. Compared to all this work on Commagene and Antiochos I proper, however, there is a (relative) lack of work on their relation to the wider Hellenistic world. Therefore it is time to try to apply such a perspective.

1.2.2 An Archaeology of Intra-Cultural Connectivity

The second aspect whereby the approach of this book differs from previous interpretations follows logically from what has been concluded above about (the importance of) connectivity and the existence of a Hellenistic *oikumene*. It concerns the understanding of the concept of acculturation and the relationship between acculturation processes on the one hand, and the understanding of specific types and styles of material culture on the other.

Acculturation perceives cultural change as dialectic between cultures, resulting in outcomes that can differ in substance. Acculturation can result in the assimilation and fusion of cultures on the one hand, or in the separation and marginalisation on the other. World history presents many different examples of these dialectics, with the outcomes being always historically specific and situated somewhere in between the ideal

⁶⁰ For how this worked with dynastic practices and ideology see *Ma 2003b* and *2003c* (which describes Hellenistic kingship in terms of both local diversification and unity and explains how they interacted) and *Strootman 2007* and *2014*. For what is called “glocalisation” as a perspective to study the Hellenistic and Roman world, see *Pitts/Versluys 2015*.

⁶¹ I am aware of the fact that due to my training as a scholar working on the (wider) Mediterranean, the Near Eastern part of the story is probably underplayed. *Strootman/Versluys 2017* is a first attempt to redress that imbalance. Commagene is on the border of Western Eurasia and Central Eurasia. In terms of context this book is more about the first than about the latter. This is due *not* to ideological choices but too practical limitations.

⁶² A new corpus of all royal inscriptions from Commagene is under preparation from C. Crowther, M. Facella and others.

types just indicated.⁶³ Nowadays it is common to describe the history of the ancient world as that kind of dialectic between various cultures, but that has not always been the case.⁶⁴ During the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth century, contact between different cultures in the ancient world was rather studied from a unilinear, diffusionist perspective whereby Greece and Rome were regarded as superior cultures that spread across the ancient Mediterranean and Near East simply because of their (inherent) superiority. This was the context wherein the concepts of Hellenisation and Romanisation were initially formulated, and we will see that this perspective (still) plays an important role in regard to the (mis)understanding of Antiochan Commagene. Classical archaeology has long struggled to overcome this point of view and to provide an image of the ancient world that consists of more than Greeks, Romans and Natives. So-called post-colonial perspectives have been crucial in relation to this development.⁶⁵ By trying to write truly dialectical history, our view of the ancient world has changed dramatically over the past decades – and so has our study of it. We have done away with thinking in terms of superior centres and barbarian peripheries, and at present the ancient world is usually seen as one vast multicultural mosaic with hundreds of equally valuable (local) cultures as constituent *tesserae*; all interconnected and influencing one another. As a result, many archaeological studies have developed into (what one could call) “transfer studies”: trying to understand the role of material culture in such acculturation processes.⁶⁶

To explain why and how the approach of this book differs from these previous (colonial and post-colonial) interpretations that all revolve around the notion of acculturation, I will first formulate three important points of critique on this model. Building on this critique, I will subsequently elaborate my choice for a different approach.

⁶³ The foundation paper for acculturation (with a description of the ideal types’ outcomes) is Redfield/Linton/Herskovits 1935, 145–148, with the definition: “Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous firsthand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups.” Cf. Cusick 1998, 111–138.

⁶⁴ Exemplary (and with both historiographical and theoretical background) is Moyer 2011, on the dialectics between Greece and Egypt. For the Hellenistic world in general, see Funck 1996.

⁶⁵ See, from a large and still growing bibliography, Webster/Cooper 1996; Mattingly 1997; Van Dommelen 2006 and 2011. For reflections on this development, see Terrenato 2005 and Sommer 2012. For how this has changed (or should change) our interpretation of (visual) material culture, see Stewart 2008; Knappett 2011; and Van Oyen 2013. For the important debates surrounding the deconstruction of the Hellenisation and Romanisation-narratives, see the recent discussion in *Archaeological Dialogues* 21(1) (2014).

⁶⁶ See the fine illustrations in Van Dommelen/Knapp 2010 and Rollinger et al. 2010.

1. The concept of acculturation (implicitly) encourages the envisioning of culture contact from a somewhat ethnological perspective: an army (or ship) full of people from culture x landing on the shore of culture y that is virtually unknown to them and subsequently engaging in “first-hand contact” (and its consequences). Archaeologists try to reconstruct the outcome of this dialectic through changes in material culture (see further below). However, in view of what has been concluded above about growing convergence and increasing connectivity from the Bronze Age onwards, the concept of acculturation seems highly problematic for the study of the (late) Hellenistic world. Due to the immense connectivity that had already characterised the Mediterranean and Near East for at least a millennium, there will in fact have been little first-hand contact (a defining element in any definition of acculturation) left. Therefore, acculturation does not appear to work well in relation to the analysis of historical contexts wherein contact and connectivity have already been continuous for quite some time and therefore are a point of departure for understanding cultural dynamics instead. In the late Hellenistic world, in other words, we should not try and define culture contact through acculturation, but instead focus on the functioning of the highly interconnected world that resulted from it.
2. A second critique on using acculturation for studies of the (late) Hellenistic world is that this approach emerges from the viewpoint of the existence of distinct cultures that would be recognisable in the archaeological record in the form of distinct “culture-styles.” However, as has been concluded above, something of a common Hellenistic culture did exist, while the idea of a single *oikumene* was present from at least the period of 200 BC onwards. Acculturation thus holds the existence of a distinct Self (their own culture) and an equally distinct Other (the other culture) as its basic premise. The first part of this introduction has already illustrated, however, that these different cultural categories could, in fact, be contextually constructed, for instance for a person like Cleopatra VII who was Egyptian *and* Greek *and* Roman *and* Near Eastern alike. Self and Other, therefore, do not seem to be oppositional categories in the late Hellenistic world, but rather a type of “cultural concept” to be employed contextually, and part of the same cultural *ambiente*.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ For similar criticism, see Gotter 2001; Huet/Valette-Cagnac 2005; Cordier 2005, and Meyer 2013. For more detail regarding my critique on acculturation in this respect, see Versluys 2015a.

3. A third important critique therefore revolves around the fact that acculturation is not at all suited to studies of (styles and types of) material culture. Acculturation regards styles and types of archaeological material characteristic of culture x as an indication of (people belonging to) culture x. In archaeology, the acculturation perspective has therefore resulted in the (often implicit) assumption that there is a direct link between style and ethnicity or between style and identity. Greek material culture, in other words, would always in some way refer to Greeks (ethnicity) or to (the idea of) Greece (identity). Within the acculturation framework, therefore, many archaeological studies conceptualise styles as a taxonomic tool to identify the cultural make-up (or cultural character) of archaeological contexts, equating a specific style with a specific culture. This is the framework wherein late Hellenistic Commagene and the visual language of Antiochos I have so far been understood, with a preference for ethnic interpretations. This is illustrated by a passage about Nemrud Dağ from Pollitt's handbook on Hellenistic art where he writes: "The mixture of Iranian and Greek elements in both the blood and the names of these rulers was also reflected in their monumental art."⁶⁸ Other scholars have slightly different opinions about this (as will be discussed in [Chapter 3](#)) but, like Pollitt, they all reason from the fact that the Antiochan visual language is the outcome of some form of acculturation process between Persians and Greeks. The equation between a culture-style and an ethnic identity directly related to that culture-style may be true, of course, but it is important to realise that it is not necessarily true, and that there are important alternatives. One alternative has already been mentioned, and that is to regard specific styles as being attached to specific identities. Although this model is better equipped for understanding complex realities, a critique is that the static style-ethnicity equation has here been replaced by an equally static style-identity equation.⁶⁹ As has been mentioned above: we may *not* conclude that by using a veristic style for their portraiture, Hellenistic kings wanted to show their loyalty to Rome simply because Roman elites used this way of portrayal as well. Similarly, a genre of Roman material culture like *terra sigillata* in an indigenous context does *not* show a desire to "become Roman."⁷⁰ And,

⁶⁸ Pollitt 1986, 274–275; this quote is also used and discussed in [Chapter 3](#).

⁶⁹ This perspective became popular in archaeology by ways of post-processualism. For a similar critique on the use of identity in combination with "generic combinations of material culture" see Pitts 2007, especially 699–700.

⁷⁰ See Roth 2007 and, in general, Roth/Keller 2007 and Van Oyen 2013.

as I will argue in [Chapter 3](#), by using a Greco-Persian style Antiochos I is *not* looking for a Greco-Persian identity.

The first part of this introduction has already demonstrated that such equations between style and identity are indeed too static. It was illustrated that in Alexandria ethnic Egyptians could have Greek names – not in order to become Greek but in order to properly function in the Greek-speaking upper class, for instance, or to pay less taxes – while simultaneously ethnic Greeks (or Romans) could be buried in the Egyptian way – while not with any intention to “become Egyptian.” In Rome during this same time, a Roman identity consisted of all kind of Greek and Hellenistic (and other foreign) elements – and consequently the use of a Greek style could show the desire for a Roman identity. Therefore, we are in need of a model that allows for a highly flexible relation between the various “culture-styles” available in the Hellenistic Mediterranean on the one hand and the various ethnic and cultural identities that existed on the other. This is particularly necessary, as I will argue in this book, in order to understand Nemrud Dağ and Antiochan Commagene.

Such a model – one that should have (a tradition of) growing convergence and intense connectivity as its defining characteristics, together with the existence of some type of common cultural framework – will be explored in [Chapter 4](#), and therefore will only be briefly introduced here. It reasons from what has been coined as the inherent pluralism of Hellenistic (material) culture, which simply means that in the Hellenistic period there were many options available from a large repertoire of Hellenistic *koine*. Hellenistic styles thus came about by means of a “strategy of emulation of other sets of visual styles, forms or iconographies which were used as engine for cultural change and the emergence of new cultural forms.”⁷¹ From this viewpoint, Hellenistic (material) culture is one large repertoire of optional identities and styles. One was able to choose (and combine) different elements from the repertoire and flexibly use them in different contexts on different occasions – as has already been illustrated for the Alexandrian tombs and the Second Pompeian style. The benefit of this model is that it does not imply a fixed relationship between a (fragmented, occasional or invented) identity and a specific style: that relationship has been made contextual. The model also implies that, as a result, over the course of time recurrent combinations of a certain style and a certain context could develop into a kind of tradition or canon (as will be further discussed in [Chapter 4](#)). A recent important book

⁷¹ Terminology and definition after *Elsner 2006a*.

that takes this perspective is Andrew Wallace-Hadrill's 2008 *Rome's cultural revolution*, wherein the concept of code-switching is used to explain the working of inherent pluralism. Code-switching describes identity as something that functions like a theatrical mask: in one context you take on identity x, while a different context asks for the display of identity y. In regard to the use of language this principle has been well established for the late Hellenistic period. Cicero's speeches in public, for instance, are markedly Latin in their language – his private letters show an abundant use of Greek.⁷² This reveals nothing about Cicero's ethnicity and only little about his cultural identity. The use of Latin or Greek represents contextual choices and traditions: Latin in public and Greek in private. Code-switching also applies to the contextual usage of material culture, as the examples in the first part of this introduction have already illustrated.⁷³ It is only logical therefore that Wallace-Hadrill tries to develop an alternative for the acculturation perspective in his book and refers to a metaphor of the drawing and pumping of blood to and from the heart in order to explain cultural change in the first century BC. The first, diastolic phase would imply Greek culture being drawn into Italy; in the systolic phase, Greco-Roman culture is pumped away to the provinces; and so forth. One should certainly question the actual validity of this metaphor,⁷⁴ but its strength lies in the fact that where acculturation necessarily reasons from the existence of two “cultural containers” and the relations between them, here circularity within the same cultural context is put central to the understanding of cultural change. This book will argue that Nemrud Dağ is all about the complexities of replication, and will therefore reason from a similar model of circularity.

1.2.3 Beyond Representation

The third and final aspect, then, whereby this book differs from (most) previous scholarship on Commagene, is its perception of the role of material culture (in the late Hellenistic world). This approach is a logical consequence of what has been concluded above about the importance of (1) regarding the (late) Hellenistic era as a global world having something of a common culture that is the outcome of growing interconnectedness over time and (2) the extremely dynamic, circular and contextual system

⁷² Cf. Adams 2003 and Dupont/Valette-Cagnac 2005.

⁷³ For the theoretical background and more examples, see Poblome/Malfitana/Lund 2013 as well as Versluys 2013a and 2015a.

⁷⁴ See an important review like Osborne/Vout 2010, and the conclusions to Versluys 2013a and 2015a.

of interplay, in material culture, between identities and styles that is the result of it.⁷⁵

Above, Hellenistic (material) culture has been described as one large repertoire of optional styles and iconographies. These were taken from the repertoire to fulfil specific functions in specific contexts. As such, certain traditions developed: certain styles and iconographies became associated with certain functions or contexts and the meanings there expressed. It has already been mentioned, for instance, how Egyptian styles and iconographies in Alexandria became so strongly associated with the afterlife that, over time, all Alexandrians were buried in “the Egyptian way.” Therefore, if we find a tomb decorated with Egyptian gods in the late Hellenistic (eastern) Mediterranean, this does not (automatically) imply that an (ethnic) Egyptian was buried there or that the person cremated or inhumed was a practitioner of Egyptian religion. This had simply become the standard for decorating tombs for certain social strata in certain parts of the (late) Hellenistic world.⁷⁶ Tonio Hölscher has been a pioneer in his analysis of this system in regard to the many Greek styles that were part of the Hellenistic repertoire, characterising it as “semantic” and taking the period circa 200 BC as its real beginning.⁷⁷ By calling it semantic, he made a similar point to the one made above here, albeit in a more applied manner: in the late Hellenistic world we cannot reason from a direct equation between either style and ethnicity or style and identity. Styles and iconographies, on the other hand, were now slowly developing meanings of their own through the repeated ways in which they were used after having been selected from the available repertoire. These “stylistic and iconographic dynamics” should not be underestimated. Already from the Bronze Age onwards, different styles of material culture were distributed and adopted by people from heterogeneous cultural backgrounds across the Mediterranean and Near East. For instance, the Phoenicians transported culturally very heterogeneous cargo throughout the entire Mediterranean. In this way, these heterogeneous styles and elements acquired meanings independently from the cultures they originally belonged to. Hölscher is probably right in saying that the system is only really semantic – that is to say, that styles and iconographies can function totally independently from the ethnic or cultural categories they originally belonged to – from around 200 BC onwards. We have seen above that this period constituted

⁷⁵ The importance of the relation between these two aspects is extensively discussed in Versluys 2013a, 2014a and 2015a.

⁷⁶ Cf. Riggs 2005; Versluys 2010.

⁷⁷ Hölscher 1987; his work will be more extensively discussed in Chapter 4.

an important next step in the convergence of the Hellenistic world – but it clearly had its antecedents from the Bronze Age onwards.

A crucial point therefore, which is not so much stressed by Hölscher, is the meaning that these styles and iconographies were able to create and encompass over time. By their continuous application in certain contexts or for certain purposes they, as it were, came to stand for those contexts and purposes and thus acquired some form of presence and agency on their own. Think again about the tomb decorated in the Egyptian style and with Egyptian iconographies presented as an example above. On entering the tomb a family member would probably not have been so much concerned about the exact identity of those different divine figures, or what they were engaged in and what they precisely meant. On the contrary: the Egyptian style and iconography will have signalled an atmosphere of the mortuary and divine – and would thus immediately have silenced the entering visitor. Chapters 3 and 4 will argue that such an approach to material culture is important to understand Antiochan material culture. We should look at what the elements and iconographies depicted on Nemrud Dağ (originally) meant, but we should equally focus on what they actually did. With Hölscher, such an approach shares a focus on stylistic elements routinely categorised as Greek (or Egyptian or Persian) as having no direct link with ethnic or cultural identities going by the same name, and thus being semantic. Unlike Hölscher, however, the approach developed in this study has not the semiotics of rhetoric as *explanandum* (with Quintilian always looming large) but rather the cultural biography of these stylistic elements themselves.⁷⁸

Understanding material culture as constitutive of its context – and thus trying to understand the impact of things on human society and history – is at present very much à la mode again. This is generally referred to as “the material turn.”⁷⁹ This is not the place to discuss that important and exciting development in detail.⁸⁰ One of its most important practical

⁷⁸ For this problem in specific and general terms, see Squire 2009, in particular 83–87, and Squire 2013. For an alternative approach, comparable to the one I develop in this study, see Meyer 2013 on what is called “Greco-Scythian.”

⁷⁹ A selection of recent literature: Thomas 1991; Freedberg 1991; Gell 1998; Gumbrecht 2003; DeMarrias/Gosden/Renfrew 2004; Miller 2005; Knappett 2005; Gosden 2005; Tilley/Keane/Kuechler-Fogden et al. 2006; Boivin 2008; Knappett/Malafouris 2008; Garrow/Gosden/Hill 2008; Flood 2009; Hicks/Beaudry 2010; Saurma-Jeltsch/Eisenbeiß 2010; Olsen 2010; Van Oyen 2013; Versluys 2014a; Van Eck 2015.

⁸⁰ It is remarkable to see how different the trajectories of the various disciplines dealing with objects (Archaeology, Art History and Anthropology) have been in this respect. For archaeologists Gosden 2005 is perhaps still the best introduction to and illustration of the problem, now together with Hodder 2012. Art historians have powerful statements in Freedberg

applications has already been illustrated in discussing the example of the tomb decorated in the Egyptian style above: *it redirects our attention from the representation and meaning of things towards their presence and agency*.⁸¹ From the Enlightenment onwards, objects have been more and more reduced to the status of historical sources alone. As such, they are perceived as carriers of meaning; a meaning that is imagined as being imbued on them by people. This is the distinction between the (active) subject and the (passive) object as formulated by Descartes. In reality, however, relations between subject and object are certainly not so clear-cut – in his 1991 classic *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*, Bruno Latour has even argued that the distinction itself is false. Most of the things people do are, in fact, the result of their interaction with *things*: something scholars call “human-thing entanglement.”⁸² This does not imply that things are alive, but that we ascribe qualities to things that we usually ascribe to human beings alone. It is useful to remind ourselves of the fact that such was the default mode in antiquity towards statues and other representations – statues of the gods did not so much represent them but *were* the gods, a statue of the king did not much represent him but *was* the king⁸³ – and certainly not towards such naturalistic objects alone.⁸⁴

Likewise the Commagenean (architectural) monuments, statues and reliefs studied in this book were active agents in their relationship with people, rather than simply a representation of meaning (alone). We should therefore not only look at what they *represent* in order to try and write the history of Commagene, but also at what they *did*.⁸⁵

Using this approach in the study of Antiochan Commagene may be particularly useful because so far interpretations of Commagene's material culture have revolved around a text; namely, the great cult inscription that contains the *nomos*. (See [Appendix](#).) This is enhanced by the fact that this text

1989 and Gell 1998, now with Van Eck 2015. Anthropology has been much influenced by the London School of Material Culture Studies (cf. Miller 2005). The work by Bruno Latour is foundational for all of them. Van Eck/Versluys/ter Keurs 2015 is an article that tries to work towards an interdisciplinary approach relevant to all three disciplines.

⁸¹ Cf. Gumbrecht 2003.

⁸² Cf. Hodder 2012 and the work by Tim Ingold, for instance Ingold 2013.

⁸³ And one could make love to Praxiteles' statue of the Cnidian Aphrodite, as Pliny (NH 36.12) recalls. All these examples are discussed and commented upon in Bussels 2012; see also Squire 2009.

⁸⁴ For which see now the important volume edited by Bielfeldt (Bielfeldt 2014).

⁸⁵ Nicolas Thomas (Thomas 1999, 5–20; 16) characterises the importance of this approach very well when he writes that “the interpretative strategy of regarding things essentially as expressions of cultural, subcultural, religious, or political entities, depends on too static and literal an approach to their meanings.”

explicitly seems to explain what Antiochan material culture is about and how it should be understood. Naturally, this great cult inscription provides valuable information about the past, in this case Antiochan Commagene. But it is important to realise that this text was produced in the past in order to do many other things; for instance, to influence the production (and reproduction) of structures of power and identity.⁸⁶ The intimate relationship between writing and power is well known, particularly in pre-modern societies.⁸⁷ What Antiochos I achieved through placing great cult inscriptions all across his kingdom was not only writing per se, but also a highly visible and, through its form, rather intimidating kind of public writing. This book will therefore not deal with the great cult inscription and the *nomos* as a literary or epigraphical text, but as a publicly displayed stone with an inscription in Greek.⁸⁸ This choice is also related to the research on Commagene that has already been conducted: based on that carefully laid foundation, my work attempts to take a different direction. The great cult inscription and other forms of Antiochan material culture have been extensively and expertly dealt with by others as historical evidence, although often these studies have dealt with religious developments alone. Largely lacking, however, are interpretations that focus on the functioning of the many inscriptions and other elements of Antiochan material culture in late Hellenistic Commagene itself. Discussion is needed not merely on what these elements represent or tell us, but rather what they do.⁸⁹ Such a perspective might provide us with alternative questions and interpretations.

1.3 The Structure of the Book

It must be emphasised that the three main and strongly interrelated aspects of the approach taken by this book – (1) a focus on the wider context of the

⁸⁶ Cf. Moreland 2001, 78: “we must abandon our fixation with texts and artefacts simply as *evidence* in the present (although they certainly are that) and consider more carefully how words and things were used, manipulated, and imposed *in the past*.” On the relation between text and image, see Squire 2009.

⁸⁷ See Bertrand 1990, 103: “Il faut admettre, et ce n’est pas un paradoxe, que ce n’est pas pour transmettre une information que les décrets sont publiés.” (“It must be admitted, and this is not a paradox, that these decrees are not published in order to transmit information.”) Cf. Woolf 1996 and, summarising, Moreland 2001, 87–93 (“The power of the word”).

⁸⁸ Cf. Woolf 1996, 28: “The historian’s tendency to treat inscriptions as a special kind of text needs to be modified, in other words, with a recognition that they are also a special kind of monument.”

⁸⁹ The big difference between the two is further elaborated on and illustrated in Mol/Versluys 2014.

Hellenistic world with its common (material) culture (*A global Hellenistic world*), (2) an understanding of styles and types of material culture as semantic elements or cultural concepts within that world (*An archaeology of intra-cultural connectivity*) and (3) a “materiality” or agency perspective towards (styles of) material culture (*Beyond representation*) – are neither new nor original. However, they have not yet been properly used in studies of Nemrud Dağ and Commagene under Antiochos I, and I hope that when combined they will provide worthwhile perspectives for future research.

Chapter 2 presents a historical geography of Commagene. It has been written for the reader who is knowledgeable of the archaeology and history of the Hellenistic world but not an expert on Commagene. It provides an overview in preparation for Chapters 3 and 4 and – equally important – it provides an overview in order to evaluate the evidence. First, the archaeological research that has so far been conducted in the region is briefly summarised to introduce the most important scholars and projects in Commagenean archaeology. A brief historical narrative is followed by an overview of the archaeology of the region. Here the dynastic monuments that Commagene is famous for will be introduced first; two subsequent sections will deal with the cities and the many villages. My treatment of the historical and archaeological evidence in this chapter is explicitly not meant to be a thorough or definitive demonstration. The purpose, rather, is to make clear the larger framework. Therefore, the final section of the chapter critically evaluates what will prove to be the specific nature of the archaeological sources at our disposal and will discuss the consequences of this state of affairs.

Chapters 3 and 4 constitute the interpretative core of the book and focus on identity and style respectively. These subjects are, of course, strongly intertwined and their division into two chapters is somewhat artificial – as the analysis itself will show. Nemrud Dağ allows us to address a wide range of important theoretical problems that have long provoked, and are still provoking, Classical, Mediterranean and Near Eastern Archaeology – and that are particularly relevant for the archaeology of first century BC Commagene. Pairing style and identity will prove to be a useful and convenient shorthand to approach these issues.

The identity section (Chapter 3) focuses on *what* Antiochan material culture does in Commagene. It starts by discussing the different elements of the Antiochan project not in detail but in structural terms. Six elements are distinguished – a hilltop sanctuary, a temple-tomb in the form of a tumulus, colossal statues, a canonical text, *dexiosis* reliefs and ancestor galleries – and all these elements are contextualised by comparative

reasoning. In order to properly understand this dynastic programme the next section explores what we know about Commagene's social context. Its negative conclusion – we know frustratingly little about the inhabitants of Commagene, their lives and identities in the first century BC – will demonstrate that an ethnic understanding of Antiochos I's programme cannot be automatically postulated in the sense that his kingdom would have consisted of Greeks and Persians and that hence the king looked for a Greco-Persian identity in his self-display. To explore alternative understandings, the next section describes three contexts wherein similar strategies are visibly used. For Hellenistic Egypt processes of (what has been called) "ethnic manoeuvring" have been described and illustrated in all kinds of social strata. A second important comparison that will be advanced is the self-presentation of the Hasmonean kings. Lastly, the case of two (so-called) client kings, Herod the Great (from Iudea) and Juba II (from Mauretania), will be adduced insofar as their publicly displayed identity is concerned. In all three cases "inventing traditions" will prove to be an important mechanism, and with this conclusion the next section returns to Antiochos I in order to indicate what the important (invented) traditions to his project entailed. Antiochos I was evidently looking back, and resemblances with the self-display of the Carian king Mausollos (fourth century BC) and the dynastic ideology of the Seleucids are pertinent. However, Antiochos I also had to look around and look forward, and take the growing Roman influence in the region into account. The conclusion brings all the arguments together and argues that what Antiochos did should be interpreted as a thoroughly Hellenistic attempt at a form of canon building in order to provide dynastic ideology and social order. The final section returns to Commagenean archaeology proper and critically discusses some of its premises and interpretations on the basis of the conclusions of this chapter.

The discussion of style ([Chapter 4](#)) focuses on *how* the Antiochan programme sought to achieve its aims by the creation of a visual language with Greek as well as Persian inspiration. How should we understand these elements and their coexistence in the Antiochan style? The [opening section](#) first presents an overview of scholarly interpretations of the Antiochan style and concludes by proposing to see it as the juxtaposition of discrete elements in a process of bricolage. The subsequent section explores what the elements that are combined to constitute this visual language actually meant: What is it that we call Greek and Persian? It will be concluded that the Greek element should be regarded as Hellenism, while the Persian element was used to claim dynastic legitimacy – something I propose to

define as “Persianism.” Both usages of the cultural scenarios Greek and Persian have many parallels in the period. A final step, then, is to account for this specific Antiochan form of bricolage by means of looking for contemporary comparisons. In those cases, which elements are shown and combined, and how and why are these elements used? Drawing on and expanding the work of Tonio Hölscher and other scholars as already briefly introduced above, these questions are explored in a section that advances parallels from late Republican and Augustan Rome; from the Parthian world; and from the Eastern Mediterranean, mainly the Levant. The section shows that the bricolage of Antiochos I should be seen against the background of what evidently was a general trend in the Hellenistic world during the latter half of the first century BC. One of the main characteristics of this eclecticism was that its end result had to be as innovative and unique as possible. The conclusion describes the relation between the Greek and the Persian element in the visual language of Antiochos I.

The postscript is written as a brief outlook and explores the possibilities the present study brings to light for the study of Commagenean and Hellenistic history and archaeology in the future.

Finally, a remark on what this study is and is not.

The core argument of this book is that Antiochos I’s actions are typical of Hellenistic kingship in the first century BC, and that they constitute an important consumer and producer of Hellenistic *koine*. In my aim to prove this point I will stress that Antiochan material culture should be seen as a dynastic court style created by the conscious appropriation of cultural elements and styles that were at hand: it was a cultural project. This strategy of bricolage is one of the defining characteristics of the period as far as cultural innovation is concerned, and also in relation to material culture. In structural terms, Nemrud Dağ is therefore not a *Sonderfall*, even though it still is often represented as such. On the contrary: what is happening in late Hellenistic Commagene is illustrative of the (intra-)cultural dynamics characterising the late Hellenistic period. Nemrud Dağ is an important and so far largely neglected monument for our understanding of a crucial transitional phase from (what we call) “Hellenistic” to (what we call) “Roman.” Therefore, what happens in late Hellenistic Commagene is relevant, as this book will show, to a large variety of important discussions, such as the functioning of Hellenistic *koine* and the genesis of Roman “art,” Hellenism and Persianism in antiquity, dynastic propaganda and the power of images, Romanisation in the East, the contextualising of the Augustan cultural revolution, and the role of Greek culture in the

Roman world. However, so far Antiochan Commagene has largely been studied from the perspective of Hellenistic and Roman archaeology and history as something marginal and non-representative.

The aim of this book, therefore, is to clear the path in order to make such broader analyses of Nemrud Dağ and late Hellenistic Commagene possible. For this reason, this is a small book about a vast subject. It is intended as a preliminary study to explore the developments in space and time that Antiochan Commagene was part of. The value of this book lies, I hope, in the perspectives it introduces for the study of both Antiochan Commagene and for the (late) Hellenistic world in general. It is an exploration and not an exhaustive treatment, and I hope that it will be understood as a set of prolegomena to contribute to the study of Antiochan Commagene and the functioning of Hellenistic (material) culture.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ On purpose, therefore, this book will not deal with epigraphy in its own right, nor will it discuss in depth religious aspects and developments, or specifics of iconography and iconology, or astrological aspects.

2 | Commagene: A Historical Geography

The first century BC was a remarkable period in the history of Commagene; one that was characterised by rapid and dramatic changes and innovations.¹ This chapter provides an overview of the available historical and archaeological sources, and it explicitly serves as an introduction to the discussions in [Chapters 3 and 4](#). The historical sources have recently been compiled and discussed in a reliable and important monograph by Facella.² I refer to that book for a presentation and in-depth discussions of all available texts. The reader should note, however, that I do not agree with Facella's strategy of using the texts compiled by Antiochos I as historical sources on the history of Commagene without serious deconstruction (see further below).³ An overview of the archaeological sources was provided by Dörner and, later, by Wagner in several articles and (popular) books.⁴ For this chapter, I have used their data and supplemented them with recent finds and literature. In 2011 Blömer and Winter published their eagerly awaited archaeological guide for Commagene. Theirs is a splendid but very different overview, meant to be a practical (travel) guide and focused on the whole *longue-durée* history of Commagene.⁵ Very recently, in 2014, Brijder has provided detailed and up-to-date descriptions of all sites related to Antiochos I, adding important new observations and suggestions. In order not to provide too much overlap with all these basic descriptions of the same corpus of texts and

¹ Cf. Hoepfner 1983, 59: "Als Antiochos I um 69 v. Chr. die Regierung in Kommagene übernahm, waren die politischen Verhältnisse im Vorderen Orient so chaotisch wie nie zuvor" ("When Antiochos I began his reign over Commagene in 69 BC, this was a period of unprecedented political turmoil in the Near East"). Kropp (Kropp 2013, Chapter 1) presents a fine and up-to-date historical overview. Note that this chaos is better understood as constant flux than as a development of decline that would only end with the coming of the Romans. Cf. for this (historiographic) problem in general, Ma 2003a, 5.

² Facella 2006.

³ Although this clearly is still common opinion, see most recently Kropp 2013, 23 (although with prudent doubts on page 186 where Kropp calls the claimed descent of Antiochos I "perhaps fictional").

⁴ See Dörner 1987 and Wagner 1987.

⁵ I have checked the (interpretative) overview of this chapter against their guidebook and have profited very much from their detailed observations.

monuments – now easily available in various languages – the overview presented in this chapter has been written with the discussions on identity and style from the subsequent [Chapters 3](#) and [4](#) in mind and, moreover, with the intent to critically evaluate the nature and the quality of the available data. What are the possibilities and the impossibilities of the sources? And what kind of history can be based on them? For that reason I have also integrated the results of field surveys.⁶ Although this book focuses on Antiochan Commagene (roughly the first century BC), the overview covers a somewhat broader period, as it is helpful to understand what occurred shortly before and after – and, again, to acknowledge the specific nature of the historical and archaeological data for the Antiochan period.

Commagene is an area roughly equivalent to the modern Turkish province of Adıyaman. It was bounded on the north by Cappadocia, on the east by the Euphrates (and Mesopotamia), on the south by Cyrrhестice, and on the west by Cilicia.⁷ ([Fig. 1.11](#)) Strabo (16.2.3 and 12.2.5) described Commagene as quite a small country, with a royal residence at Samosata, surrounded by extremely fertile land, which may have been extensively planted with fruit trees. Parts of Commagene consisted of steppe lands,⁸ and Flavius Josephus (*Antiquitates Judaicae* 14, 441) recalled that woods covered large parts of its territory. Its wealth – alluded to, for instance, by Tacitus (*Historiae* 2.81) in the first century AD – was, most scholars assume, partly based on its mineral resources as well.⁹ But surely its strategic position at an important Euphrates crossing, on the road from the northern Levant towards western Anatolia and Europe, and as such as part of the Silk Road, also was a decisive factor. ([Fig. 2.1](#)) The presence of drinking and irrigation water was a fundamental factor when settlements were established. Therefore, most sites are close to rivers that flow all year, such as the Euphrates and the ancient Chabinas (Cendere Suyu). Many settlements may have been short-lived, due to their position on the riverbank.¹⁰ Commagene was part of the land-bridge between Asia and

⁶ Several survey teams have investigated the Commagenean landscape, although most of their work must be described as rescue archaeology (see *infra*).

⁷ Cohen 2006, 30. ⁸ Shipley 2000, 279.

⁹ Inscriptions for Iupiter Dolichenus sometimes carry the epitheton *nato, ubi ferrum nascitur* (“born where the iron grows”); cf. Ergeç/Wagner 2000. On Commagene’s richness in general, see Facella 2010.

¹⁰ The historical geography of Commagene has been the subject of research by Wagner, French and Facella (Wagner 1982, 133; Wagner 1983, 187; French 1991; Facella 2006, 51–71). The reconstruction, as presented in the map published by Wagner, most recently in Wagner 2000, 14, is generally accepted as correct, but does not show chronological developments.



Figure 2.1 The location and position of Commagene in first-century BC Eurasia.

Europe, but it is important to realise that in antiquity it was regarded as northern Syria. In geographical terms the elevated Syrian plain begins at Samsat, and in the second century AD Lucian of Samosata, for instance, referred to himself as both “Syrian” and “Assyrian.”¹¹

2.1 Earlier Research

Eastern Anatolia, and the territory of Commagene in particular, was first systematically explored by archaeologists Carl Humann and Otto Puchstein in the late nineteenth century.¹² In 1883 Osman Hamdi Bey travelled to Nemrud Dağ, prompted by Karl Sester’s discovery and the subsequent explorations by Sester and Puchstein.¹³ They all focused on the *hierothesion* on top of Nemrud Dağ, although other archaeological remains that they encountered were also meticulously studied and documented. Earlier, in 1835, Helmuth Graf von Moltke, a military advisor to the Porte, had mapped the area and described some of the eye-catching monuments, such as the relief of Samos II in Gerger Kalesi

Drawing on an older version of this map, French (*French 1991*, figs. 1–3) published maps of the kingdom under Mithridates I, under Antiochos IV and in the second and third centuries AD. Facella (*Facella 2006*, 59–71) has made additional observations, including information about the road system, cf. also *Comfort 2008*. On the Euphrates road and other Roman roads in Commagene, see *French forthcoming*. The most recent interpretative overview is provided in *Winter 2008*.

¹¹ Babelon (*Babelon 1890*, 208) remarked: “La Commagène . . . était un district de la Syrie”; Waldis (*Waldis 1920*) even had “Nord Syrien” in his title, and Sullivan (*Sullivan 1990*) grouped “Commagene” under “Levant.” See also the remarks by L. Marfoe on how the Chicago Euphrates Archaeological Project came about: “Furthermore, I had very little research interest in Turkey, had even less knowledge of its archaeology and had never worked there. Soon thereafter, however, I . . . realised that . . . the Karaba basin was archaeologically closely related to northern Syria, an area in which I held a substantial interest” (*Marfoe 1990*, 1). Cohen (*Cohen 2006*, 30–31) remarked that “For many of the ancients it was linked with Mesopotamia,” quoting Strabo (16.1.22) who referred to “the Zeugma of Commagene which is where Mesopotamia begins.” See also *Sartre 2004*, which remarks on Commagene in n. 5 of the Introduction: “On laissera donc de côté la Commagène, considérée comme un appendice syrien vers le Nord. Son histoire et son peuplement sont d’ailleurs liés à ceux de la Syrie” (“So we leave aside Commagene, considered as a Syrian appendix to the North. Its history and settlement are connected to those of Syria”). For Lucian of Samosata and his background see *Swain 1996*, 46ff; *Facella 2012*; and *Andrade 2013*, Part III. For Syrian identity in the Hellenistic and Roman world in general, see now *Andrade 2013*.

¹² *Humann/Puchstein 1890*. For a more extensive *Forschungsgeschichte* on Commagene than provided here see *Dörner/Goell 1963*, 8–24; *Dörner 1987*; *Wagner 1983*; *Facella 2006*, 17–49 (“La Commagene ritrovata”); and now *Brijder*, part II.

¹³ *Hamdi Bey 1883*. Cf. *Radt 2003*, with the beautiful story of Humann who, on his way to Nemrud Dağ on what was planned to be the first real expedition, encountered Hamdi Bey at the Euphrates crossover at Samsat on 2 June 1883, who was then returning from Nemrud Dağ.

(see below). This way of exploring the Classical landscape – travelling, asking local inhabitants about antiquities, and documenting finds – continued until late into the twentieth century and achieved impressive results. Many of the Commagenean *dexiosis* reliefs were discovered in this way, as was the site of Arsameia ad Nymphaeum. The archaeological exploration of the area was primarily artefact- and site-driven, but from the beginning it also included what is now called the *longue-durée* perspective: remains from all periods were documented and studied.¹⁴ Dörner, for example, Commagene’s most prominent explorer in the twentieth century, worked on the Hellenistic age, Roman era, Byzantine and Crusader periods concurrently, while also paying attention to earlier (prehistoric) finds.

After having finished a historical PhD on the region, Dörner started working in Commagene as a young scholar in 1938. (Fig. 2.2) He quickly published his *Forschungsreise* and continued to intensively study the area and its archaeology thereafter.¹⁵ Based at Münster, he focused on newly discovered Arsameia ad Nymphaeum from 1951 onwards, publishing the first excavations with Goell in 1963 (1953–1956).¹⁶ (Fig. 2.3) During the same period he was involved as an epigraphist in the Nemrud Dağ explorations by Goell.¹⁷ From 1971 Dörner tried to start a restoration project on Nemrud Dağ, but was not granted a permit until 1984.¹⁸ His discoveries, articles and books on Commagene throughout all historical periods remain fundamental to the present day, and did a great deal to bring Commagene to scholarly attention. Dörner’s work was continued by his pupil Wagner, who made several new discoveries, compiled important syntheses, and wrote a monograph on Seleukeia/Zeugma.

¹⁴ The first person to focus explicitly on pottery was Charles Burney. He visited important sites in Eastern Turkey and collected samples of surface pottery. It is only logical that his survey, conducted largely on bicycle and focused on pre-Classical pottery, cannot be used for systematic comparison. Burney explored a small region south of Adiyaman and documented nineteen sites. Cf. *Russell 1980*.

¹⁵ For Dörner’s investigations in Commagene see his own overview in *Dörner 1987*. For his work and career in general (he also worked on Bithynia) see the introduction in *Festschrift Dörner*, ix–xv. His quote from *Dörner 1971*, 24 seems indicative of his attachment to the area: “In allen Jahren des Krieges, in Schrecken, Not und Elend blieb Kommagene eine freundliche Vision” (“In all the years of war, terror, distress and misery, Commagene remained a friendly vision”).

¹⁶ *Dörner/Goell 1963*; for the subsequent excavations of 1963–1967 see *Hoepfner 1983*. For the relations between Dörner and Goell from Goell’s point of view see several interesting remarks in *Sanders 2004*, 482–524.

¹⁷ His edition of the text was finally published in *Goell/Sanders* (chs. 5 and 6), but there are several prior articles on specific aspects.

¹⁸ See *Dörner 1985*, 597–602.



Figure 2.2 Friedrich Karl Dörner and Friedrich Naumann in Commagene in 1938, with local assistants.

Other scholars who continued the Münster tradition to the present day are Georg Petzl, Sençer Şahin, Elmar Schwertheim and, from 1997 onwards, Engelbert Winter.

Goell worked at Arsameia ad Nymphaeum and Samosata, but her main interest was Nemrud Dağ.¹⁹ During several campaigns in the 1950s she cleared the monument of gravel that had fallen from the tumulus and provided the first picture of the complex as a whole. Later investigations concentrated on finding the tomb of Antiochos I. Unfortunately Goell did not publish her complete findings and ideas. As a result, her attempts to bring Nemrud Dağ out of obscurity (in her opinion it was “too Classical for Orientalists and too Orientalist for Classicists”)²⁰ and to present it as “a subtle blending of Old-Anatolian-Hittite traditions, Persian-Parthian influence and the Hellenistic vocabulary” only succeeded with the publication of the full work in 1996 by Donald H. Sanders.²¹ By this time Goell’s

¹⁹ For Goell see the editor’s preface, Goell’s own introduction and K. Goell’s foreword (“a personal story about my sister”) in *Goell/Sanders* and the literature mentioned in 1.2 n. 36.

²⁰ For a discussion of this problem in general see *Hauser 1999* and *Hauser 2001*.

²¹ For the quotes see *Goell/Sanders*, xxiii.



Figure 2.3 Friedrich Karl Dörner and Theresa Goell in Arsameia ad Nymphaeum during one of their campaigns.

ideas on the monument, which she had formulated in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, had been superseded by later research.²²

Other attempts at a systematic mapping of archaeological remains in the Commagenean landscape are connected with the South East Anatolia Project, which was primarily designed to provide energy, irrigation water and flood prevention in the lower Turkish parts of the Euphrates and Tigris and the plains between the rivers. A team from Istanbul University conducted a survey in 1975, focusing mainly on the standing remains in the area to be flooded.²³ In 1977 this was continued by another survey by M. Özdoğan, which focused on mounds and prehistoric remains.²⁴ On the basis of these surveys the Turkish authorities initiated, amongst

²² See the (justly) critical review *Jacobs 1998b*, 344–351. For some of the reasons behind this long (and laborious) publication process, see *Sanders/Gill 2004*.

²³ Published in *Serdaroğlu 1977*. ²⁴ Published in *Özdoğan 1977*.

other things, an archaeological salvation programme that led to several international projects in and around Commagene.²⁵

The British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara selected Tille Höyük, a Euphrates site in Commagenean territory. Excavations began in 1978 and continued until the area was submerged in 1990. Only two of the four final reports have thus far been published.²⁶ From 1985 to 1991, the Adıyaman survey by members of the British team working at Tille explored a large part of the Euphrates valley below Samosata, as well as a large area south of Adıyaman.²⁷ During the same period (between 1989 and 1990) the Tigris-Euphrates archaeological reconnaissance project surveyed areas around the Birecik and Carchemish dams.²⁸

As already mentioned in [Chapter 1](#), the last decades have seen several new projects and initiatives in Commagenean archaeology. Rescue excavations undertaken at Zeugma from the 1990s onwards have provided much information on this Roman frontier and garrison town in the Imperial period. Archaeological remains from Antiochan Commagene have been found (see *infra*), and also an architectural survey of the area around Zeugma and the Euphrates yielded new material. Other projects have focused on Nemrud Dağ and Antiochan Commagene in particular. The German Nemrud Dağ Projekt, started in 1987 to follow up Dörner's work, has only executed some of the work that was planned.²⁹ The international Nemrud Dağ Project from the University of Amsterdam worked on the restoration and conservation of the site for three years as had been planned, but subsequent campaigns were obliged to operate on a much smaller scale.³⁰ After the Dutch initiative a team from the Middle East Technical University of Ankara (METU) has been working on the site.³¹ A team from Münster started investigations in Doliche in 2001, which have so far yielded important and promising results (see *infra*).

²⁵ The Oriental Institute (Chicago) took part in the salvage programme in two areas: the excavation of Kurban Höyük, a site close to Commagene but at the eastern side of the Euphrates opposite Birecik Höyük; and the Chicago Euphrates Archaeological Survey in the Karababa dam reservoir area from 1980 to 1984 (see *Marfoe et al. 1986*). Kurban Höyük itself was not occupied in the Hellenistic and Roman period, but the survey around it yielded information about the Hellenistic and Roman occupation phases.

²⁶ An interim report and a project summary in *Ancient Anatolia* gives information about the Hellenistic and Roman periods; see *Moore/French, forthcoming* for the final publication.

²⁷ See *Blaylock/French/Summers 1990* and *Blaylock 1998a*.

²⁸ See *Algaze et al. 1991*, and *Algaze et al. 1994*.

²⁹ See *Şahin/Wagner 1989* and for some of its results *Şahin 1991a* and *Jacobs 1997*.

³⁰ See *Nemrud Dağ Project 1, 2 and 3* for interim reports on the three campaigns. H.A.G. Brijder has now edited a conclusive monograph on the project as a whole (*Brijder*).

³¹ Cf. *Şahin Güçhan 2011*.

2.2 The Historical Background

The region has a long history of intense human occupation, as has the whole of southeast Anatolia.³² Arslantepe, near Malatya, is the best-known Bronze Age site near Commagenean territory. Copper mines near Malatya were already intensively used during that period. In Commagene itself, excavations at Tille Höyük provided data on the late Bronze Age and Iron Age transition (see *infra*).³³ A Bronze Age cemetery was recently found at Zeugma (see *infra*). In the late Hittite period, parts of what would later be Commagene belonged to the city state of Kummuh. The most remarkable remains from this period come from Ancoz, Boybeyınar, Pazarcık, Germanikeia (Hittite *Marqasi*), Sakçagözü and Samosata, the neo-Hittite capital city.³⁴ (Fig. 2.4) Apart from these finds, which provide information about religion, we know little about Hittite Kummuh. Literary sources tell us that, due to an unsuccessful uprising against the central Assyrian power, Kummuh's population was deported into Mesopotamia and replaced by people from there.³⁵ Evidence from the following Iron Age and Achaemenid periods is scant.³⁶ Through epigraphic texts, Antiochos I provides us with information about the Persian period; however, this information cannot be used as a reliable historical source on those preceding periods (see *infra*).³⁷ The first literary source available is Cicero, who wrote about Commagene on the basis of his experiences as pro-consul of Cilicia in 51–50 BC.³⁸

The history of Commagene under the Seleucids largely has to be reconstructed on the basis of later Roman sources, such as Cicero, Tacitus, Plutarch, Appian, Flavius Josephus and Cassius Dio.³⁹ These authors only mention Commagene in passing. Around 300 BC Seleukos I had control of large parts of Asia Minor. At the Euphrates, near Commagenean territory, he founded the twin cities of Seleukeia and Apamea on the western and eastern

³² Cf., summarising from a large bibliography, Hauptman 2000.

³³ For general information on this transition phase in southeast Anatolia see Hawkins 1988.

³⁴ For archaeological remains of this period see Hellenkemper/Wagner 1977, 167–173 and Kalaç/Hawkins 1989.

³⁵ See Hawkins 1975; Summers 1991, 1–6; and most recently Facella 2006, 73–78, with all earlier literature and an overview of the debate.

³⁶ See Messerschmidt 2008 and Facella 2009 for a discussion of all the evidence.

³⁷ As does, for instance, Facella 2006, 78–94; cf. the conclusion to 3.6.

³⁸ Most references are to be found in his letters *ad Familiares*; see Facella 2006, 426–427 sv. for a complete overview.

³⁹ These are quoted and discussed, with details and references, in Facella 2006; cf. her “Indice delle fonti antiche 1. fonte letterarie” on pp. 425–433. For an earlier account see Sullivan 1977.

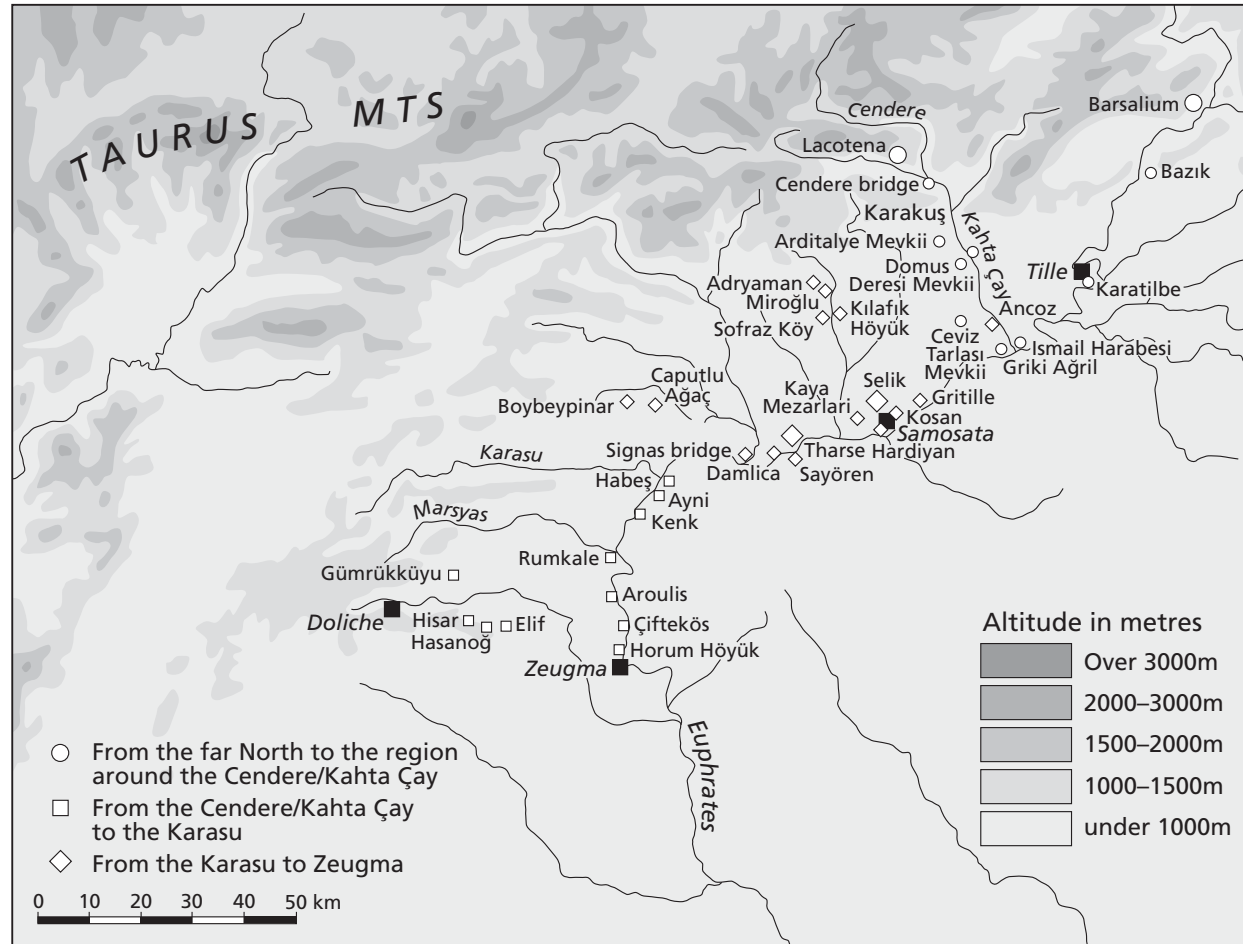


Figure 2.4 Map of Commagene, highlighting villages (drawn after Wagner 2000).

riverbanks respectively (see *infra* under Zeugma). We know nothing about the status of Commagene under Seleucid rule. The Armenian king Samos I is believed to have founded Samosata, later the capital of Commagene, in the middle of the third century BC. The second century BC saw the rise of the two powers that would play an important role in Commagene's future during the next centuries: Rome and Parthia. Their growing prominence, combined with the failing of the central Seleucid power, resulted in the rise of several small monarchies, of which Commagene was one. Other independent kingdoms that came into being around this time include Pergamon, Pontos, Baktria, Parthia, Armenia, Judea and Nabatea.⁴⁰ Diodorus tells us that a Seleucid *epistates* named Ptolemy rose to power in Commagene in 163 BC.⁴¹ Most scholars assume that Ptolemy was the first Commagenean king and that he descended from the Armenian Orontids. We know virtually nothing about the following decades. Samos II took power around 130 BC, as is concluded from some coins that have been preserved, showing a portrait with the inscription "king Samos."⁴² His successor Mithridates I Kallinikos is not mentioned in the literary record, but some coins exist with the inscription *basileos mithridatou kallinikou*. We learn more about him through his son, as Antiochos I prominently mentioned his father in his inscriptions. Antiochos I claimed that Mithridates I Kallinikos married Laodike, a daughter of the Seleucid king Antiochos VIII Grypos (125–96 BC). As Seleucid power weakened further, the regions around the Euphrates fell either to Tigranes of Armenia or to Mithridates II of Parthia.⁴³ At the death of the latter, Tigranes crowned himself King of Kings and gained control of the area in the 80s BC until he would be defeated by the Romans.

Around 70 BC Antiochos I became king of Commagene. After the defeat of Tigranes by the Romans in 69 BC, he quickly came to terms with the new power in a mutually beneficial relationship.⁴⁴ Commagene held strategic importance for the Romans, as it offered an excellent crossing into Mesopotamia and provided a buffer against the Parthians. Moreover, Commagene was rich. Commagenean territory was not affected by the

⁴⁰ For the case of Pergamon see the recent historical overview in *Evans 2012*; for the other monarchies see *Sullivan 1990*; *Ball 2000*, 30–105; and *Kaizer/Facella 2010*.

⁴¹ Diodorus Siculus 31, 19a. For this period in general, see *Gruen 1976* which describes the power vacuum in terms of inertia of the Roman Senate.

⁴² M. Facella is preparing a monograph on Commagenean coins. Thus far the material has been assembled in a Turkish dissertation from 1973 that was briefly presented by the author in 1975: *Aytuğ Taşyürek 1975*. See further *Sullivan 1973*; *Bedoukian 1985*; *Facella 2005b*; *Gariboldi 2007*; and *Brijder*, 533–562. The large majority of the material comes from the first century AD; it seems that before Antiochos IV Commagene was hardly monetised.

⁴³ Cf. *Ehling 2008*. ⁴⁴ See *Facella 2010* in particular.

Romans, and at the conference at Amisos in 65/64 BC Antiochos I's territory was even substantially enlarged and enriched when Pompey granted him Seleukeia at the Euphrates (Zeugma). Between 69 and 64 BC the people of Ephesos dedicated an inscription to "King Antiochos, God, the Righteous one, friend of the Romans and of the Greeks"; which shows that Commagenean royalty also played a role in the wider Hellenistic world.⁴⁵ In this period Commagene was considered one of the richest kingdoms of the East. Sources on Antiochos I are relatively abundant. Cicero suggested that Antiochos I was not to be trusted.⁴⁶ Several sources mention how Mark Antony besieged Samosata in vain when the Commagenean king refused to hand over some Parthian soldiers.⁴⁷ It is apparent that Antiochos I achieved an effective balance between Rome and the Parthians, and he initiated an impressive building programme across his territory for the dissemination of his ruler cult. Almost all archaeological sources from late Hellenistic Commagene are part of this programme or later derivations of it (see *infra*).

Under the rule of Antiochos' son, Mithridates II, Commagene formally became a (so-called) client kingdom.⁴⁸ Mithridates and his Commagenean troops sided with Mark Antony at Actium. The king was reaffirmed by Octavian, who decided to leave the political superstructure in the Eastern Mediterranean largely intact, although simultaneously the important city of Seleukeia/Zeusma was taken from Commagene and added to the Roman province of Syria. We know very little about Mithridates III or Antiochos III. When the latter died in 17 AD Commagene was added to the province of Syria by Germanicus.⁴⁹ In 38 AD it was returned to Antiochos IV, a member of the royal dynasty who was raised in Rome and was a friend of Caligula's. The dynasty was officially re-established by Claudius soon after, in 41 AD, and the "client king" functioned in this Roman tradition until 72 AD, when Vespasian ended the *de iure* independence of Commagene and incorporated it into the province of Syria, stationing

⁴⁵ OGIS 405; cf. *Fraser 1978*, especially 359.

⁴⁶ Cicero, *Fam.* 15,1,2; 15,3,1; and 15,4,3. For the debate on how these qualifications should be interpreted, see *Facella 2010*. This negative Roman interpretation is followed by a substantial proportion of scholarly literature as historical truth. Note, however, *Mannzmann 1978*, 578, talking about "the virtuosity of a balance-of-power politics in the best Hellenistic tradition." For Cicero, who spent time as the provincial governor of Cilicia, and the Near East, see *Andrade 2013*, Chapter 2.

⁴⁷ See *Sartre 2001*, 502, with n. 162 for this (and other) version(s) of the story.

⁴⁸ See in general still *Braund 1984*, now with *Kaizer/Facella 2010* and *Kropp 2013*.

⁴⁹ See *Speidel 2005*. Fleischer has identified a portrait statue from Samosata as Antiochos III (*Fleischer 2008*, 321–334). Kropp (*Kropp 2013*, 84–85), however, is right, in my opinion, in considering Antiochos I as a possible identification as well.

legions in Samosata and Zeugma.⁵⁰ For this entire period it is a moot point whether or not there existed something like a (religious or cultural) Commagenean identity, as most information available comes from the circle of the court alone.⁵¹

The royal family moved to Rome again at this time, and the last members that we know of are C. Iulius Antiochos IV Epiphanes, also named Philopappos, and his sister Iulia Balbilla. Philopappos is well known due to the famous Philopappos monument he built in Athens. He was an Athenian citizen and a friend of Plutarch who – apparently through substantial benefactions – was granted some rare privileges. His tomb, on a prominent location within the city, evokes associations with Rome and Greece, as well as his native Commagene.⁵²

Overview of the Commagenean royal genealogy.

King	Reign
Ptolemy	163 BC – c. 130 BC
Samos II	c. 130 BC – c. 100 BC
Mithridates I Kallinikos	c. 100 BC – c. 70 BC
Antiochos I	c. 70 BC – 36 BC
Mithridates II	36 BC – c. 20 BC
Mithridates III	c. 20 BC – 12 BC
Antiochos III	12 BC – AD 17
C. Iulius Antiochos IV Epiphanes	AD 38 – AD 72

On the basis of a series of dedications made to Septimius Severus we know that in the imperial period Commagene consisted of four cities: Samosata, Caesarea Germanica, Doliche and Perre. (Fig. 1.11) A substantial number of archaeological remains show Commagene’s transformation into a Roman frontier province, due to the presence of the legions. In

⁵⁰ On the Roman client king system – note the Romanocentric perspective inherent with the term – see Bowersock 1965, 42–61; 42: “Kings and dynasts were a useful means of control, especially in the more remote and barbaric regions, provided that the political sentiments of those rulers could be assured.” Commagene seems to be a good illustration of the fact that, as Bowersock argues, client kings were unknowingly preparing their empires for incorporation into the Roman province system. Recent literature includes Sullivan 1990; Butcher 1994, 447–453 (a review of Sullivan 1990); Kaizer/Facella 2010; Schwentzel 2010; Kropp 2013; and Andrade 2013, Chapter 3.

⁵¹ See Versluys 2012 and several other contributions to Merz/Tieleman 2012; now with Andrade 2013.

⁵² For the Philopappos monument see Santangelo 1941–1943; Kleiner 1983; and lastly Facella 2006, 354–358, with further previous literature. For the socio-political context in which this “highly studied composition” and “interesting product of a multi-national society” was built see Thompson 1987, 1–17 (quotes from p. 14).

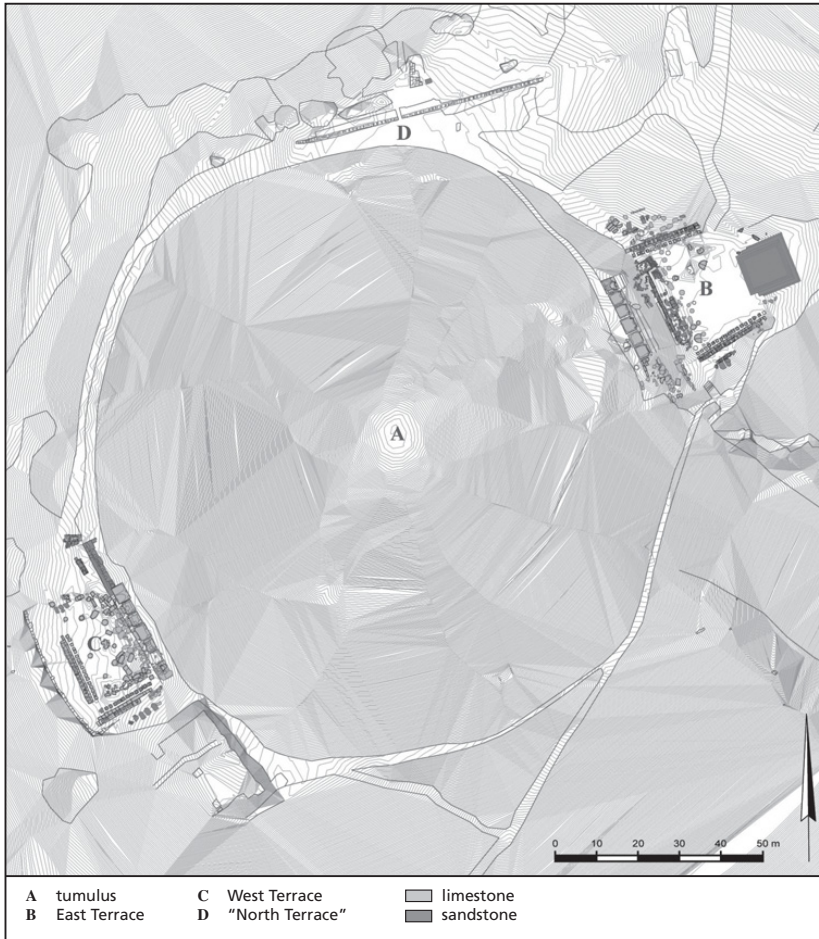


Figure 2.5 Plan of Nemrud Dağ, overview, actual situation.

particular, the rescue excavations at Zeugma, where the *Legio III Scythica* was based, have yielded information on life in this part of the Euphrates region in the second and third centuries AD. There is a debate on how the defence system was organised, as no real forts have been found in the western part of the Euphrates valley, and it is improbable that there was a permanent Roman fleet on the Euphrates.⁵³ After this period the area became a disputed frontier zone, and was conquered by Byzantine, Armenian and Mamluk forces, before it was integrated into the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁴

⁵³ See Comfort/Ergeç 2001, 34 with earlier literature.

⁵⁴ Cf. Hellenkemper 2000 (with references).

2.3 The Region and Its Archaeology

This section provides an overview of the archaeology of late Hellenistic Commagene. As explained above, it is intended as an introduction for the reader who is knowledgeable of the archaeology and history of the Hellenistic world but not an expert on Commagene; it is by no means an exhaustive treatment. It purposefully presents a general picture that is as broad as possible, ranging from colossal statues decorating a temple-tomb to small hamlets. It is worthwhile to compile such a broad overview not only to introduce the material culture, which is central to the interpretations in subsequent chapters, but also to come to evaluate the archaeological sources that have recently been characterised by Schwertheim as “*ausnehmend gut*” (exceptionally rich) (see below).

The overview has been divided into three parts. The dynastic monuments which Commagene is famous for (like the *hierotherisia* Nemrud Dağ, Arsameia ad Nymphaeum and Arsameia ad Euphratem, and mausoleia like Karakuş) will first be described and introduced. Secondly, the larger settlements of the region (like Tille, the capital city Samosata, Zeugma and Doliche) will be dealt with. Thirdly and lastly, the villages and smaller cult places will be described. In general, other eye-catching archaeological remains from earlier periods and from the later Roman period are mentioned.

2.3.1 Dynastic Monuments

Through inscriptions we know that three Commagenean monuments were *hierotherisia* (which means “sacred tomb” or “temple-tomb”; see 3.1 below): Nemrud Dağ, Arsameia ad Nymphaeum and Arsameia ad Euphratem. All three are related to Antiochos I. Nemrud Dağ and Arsameia ad Nymphaeum are among the best-explored Commagenean sites and will therefore be presented first. Subsequently, two other tombs related to the royal family (Karakuş and, although this is far from certain, Sesönk) will be introduced. All these dynastic monuments are located in the northern part of Commagene in a circle of about 40 kilometres around Nemrud Dağ; with the exception of Sesönk.⁵⁵ (Fig. 1.11)

⁵⁵ Which strengthens the recent suggestion by Blömer (Blömer 2008) that Sesönk in fact is *not* a tomb that has to be brought into connection with Commagenean royalty at all. Although Blömer’s arguments are compelling, I have here retained the traditional classification for reasons of convenience.



Figure 2.6 Nemrud Dağ: the rock of the mountain below the layer of gravel as uncovered by Goell behind the statues on the East Terrace.

Nemrud Dağ, located in the northern part of Commagene at the beginning of the Taurus Mountains, consists of a tumulus flanked at three sides by terraces.⁵⁶ (Figs. 1.10, 2.5) The monument is named *hierotheresion* in the large cult regulation that is inscribed, in Greek, at the rear of the thrones on which the colossal statues displayed on the terraces are sitting.⁵⁷ The tumulus suggests the presence of the tomb of Antiochos I as mentioned in the inscription. It consists of the original mountain, partly topped and hewn off, and a covering layer of gravel that probably comes from the rock that had been cut off from the mountain. (Fig. 2.6) The height of the tumulus is about 50 metres. As yet the tomb of Antiochos I has not been found or located with certainty.⁵⁸

The East Terrace is a rectangular area that has been flattened because part of the mountain has been cut off. (Fig. 2.7) At the west side it is bordered by a stepped area cut out from the rock. On top of this, on a second plateau also largely hewn out from the mountain, colossal statues are erected. (Figs. 2.8, 2.9) Opposite to this ensemble, a stepped structure in tuffit (the so-called fire altar) has been reconstructed, but this reconstruc-

⁵⁶ Humann/Puchstein 1890; Dörner 1978a; Sanders 1996; Utecht et al. 2003; Nemrud Dağ Project 1–2–3; Blömer/Winter, 55–67.

⁵⁷ This inscription will be dealt with in detail at the end of this section. An English translation can be found in the Appendix.

⁵⁸ For an overview of the different hypotheses on its exact location, see most recently Brijder, part III.

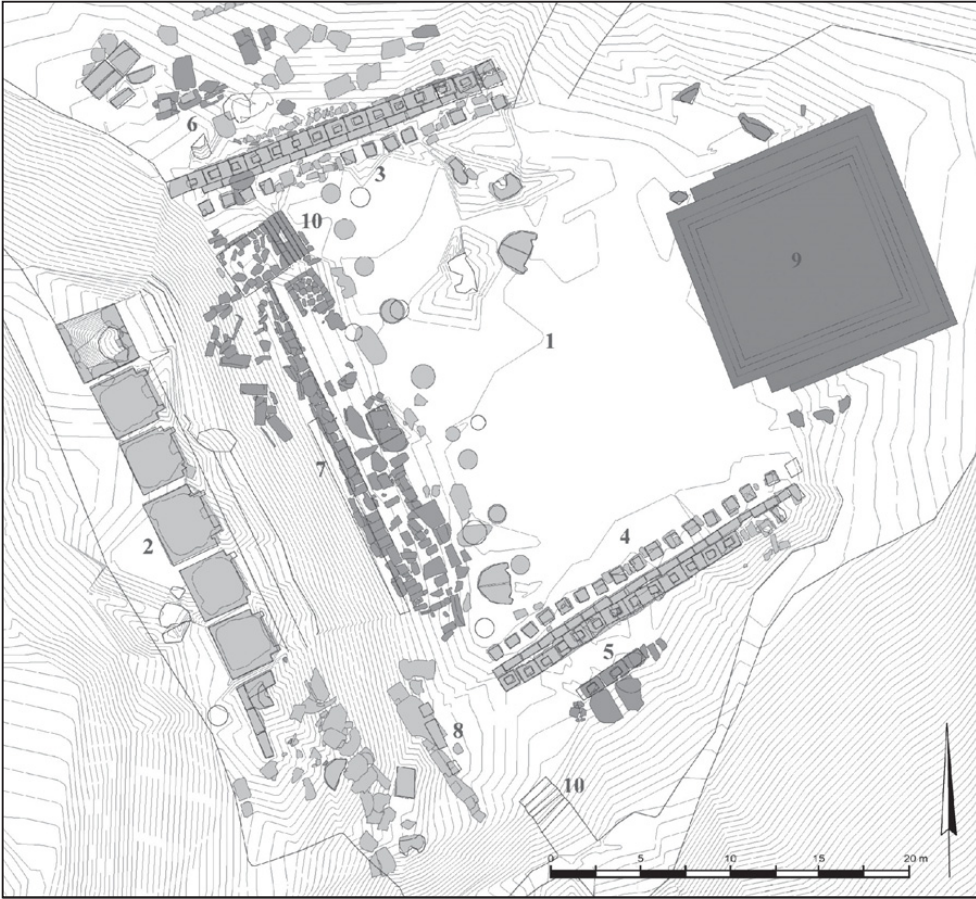


Figure 2.7 Plan of Nemrud Dağ, East Terrace, actual situation. (1) Court, (2) Row of colossal statues, (3) Paternal relief stelai, (4) Maternal relief stelai, (5/6) Sculpture pedestals, (7) *Dexiosis* reliefs and Lion horoscope, (8) Coronation reliefs, (9) Stepped altar, (10) Stairs/entrance.

tion is debatable.⁵⁹ At the south side a steep mountain slope begins; to the north there is a path leading to the North Terrace. The main entrance to the terrace seems to have been at the north-east side: a so-called procession road, *hiera hodos*, ended just below the terrace at this side. An entrance stela was found on the slope of the mountain next to this road. (Fig. 2.10) The main feature of the East Terrace is a row of colossal statues: five statues of (semi-)gods flanked at both sides by a lion/eagle pair. The podium on which the colossal statues stand has two steps in front, hewn out from the

⁵⁹ See *Nemrud Dağ Project 1*, 102. For this reason I will leave the so-called fire altar out of the analysis. For the genre as such, see recently *Plontke-Lüning 2009*.



Figure 2.8 Nemrud Dağ, East Terrace, situation in 2004.

rock. Behind the statues, a path of 3.5 m width has been spared out. This is how the great cult inscription, inscribed on the lower blocks of the statues, could be reached. (Fig. 2.11) The largest figure, Zeus-Oromasdes, stands in the centre. (The drawing in Fig. 2.12 shows how the statue is built up, what it originally looked like and which parts have been preserved.) He is flanked by Apollo-Mithras-Helios-Hermes and Artagnes-Herakles on his left and Commagene (Fig. 2.13) and Antiochos I on his right. All statues are named in the great cult inscription. The figures are seated on huge thrones, their feet resting on footstools standing between the thrones' legs. The dress of the figures is executed with little detail and shows few folds apart from the shoulders, where the tips of the mantle have been put together with a buckle. The male dress looks Persian: boots, trousers, long-sleeved tunic and cloak. Commagene has the Greek *chiton* and *himation*, of which some folds are indicated near the knees. Antiochos I, Zeus and Apollo have a bundle of weed, the so-called barsom, in their left hand on their laps. Herakles sports his club with his left hand against his shoulder, and Commagene does the same with the cornucopia. With her right hand



Figure 2.9 Nemrud Dağ, East Terrace, situation before the campaigns by Goell.

she holds fruit in her lap. At both ends a standing eagle and a squatting lion have been placed. Figure 2.14 presents an overview drawing of the (in total) nine statues.

Brijder has recently argued that it is beyond doubt that the statues were (intended to be) painted and even has proposed a tentative colour scheme.⁶⁰ If the statues indeed were (designed to be) painted, the details of the clothing and the headgear would have stood out much more prominently than is our impression today. Besides the general argument that, in antiquity, ancient sculpture generally was painted, this is a strong and more specific argument in favour of Brijder's hypothesis.

In front of the statues a podium has been cut out from the rock. Tuffit steps are placed before it against the prepared rock, made from blocks. Goell reports the discovery of fragments of large stelai similar to those on

⁶⁰ Brijder. His main arguments are (1) that *all* sculpture in antiquity was painted in bright colours and (2) that the many unfinished details of the statues must be explained by imagining that these were supposed to be painted.



Figure 2.10 Contour map of the top of Nemrud Dağ, with a reconstruction of the processional roads and the entrance stelai.

the West Terrace. She offers a reconstruction of an ensemble (a Lion horoscope and four *dexiosis* stelai) similar to the one that has been preserved on the West Terrace (see below) in front of the statues on one of the tuffit steps. At the southern side of the podium Goell reconstructs five other stelai that would show a kind of coronation.

Bases for stelai and corresponding altars line the north and south borders of the terrace. The (originally) fifteen stelai on the northern side



Figure 2.11 Nemrud Dağ, East Terrace, great cult inscription at the back of the thrones of the colossi, situation in 2004.

depicted the paternal, Persian ancestors from whom Antiochos I claimed to descend. (Fig. 2.15) Behind this row of stelai, which must have given the impression of a sculptured wall, there is a plinth with three stelai bases. The southern series contains seventeen altars, whereas thirteen bases for stelai have been preserved. The arrangement and measurements are equal to those of the opposite side. Here the seventeen claimed Macedonian and Seleucid ancestors of Antiochos I were depicted, starting with Antiochos I's daughter, wife and mother. (Fig. 2.16)

The West Terrace is a flat space partly cut out from the mountain, partly natural and partly constructed artificially. (Fig. 2.17) At the eastern side

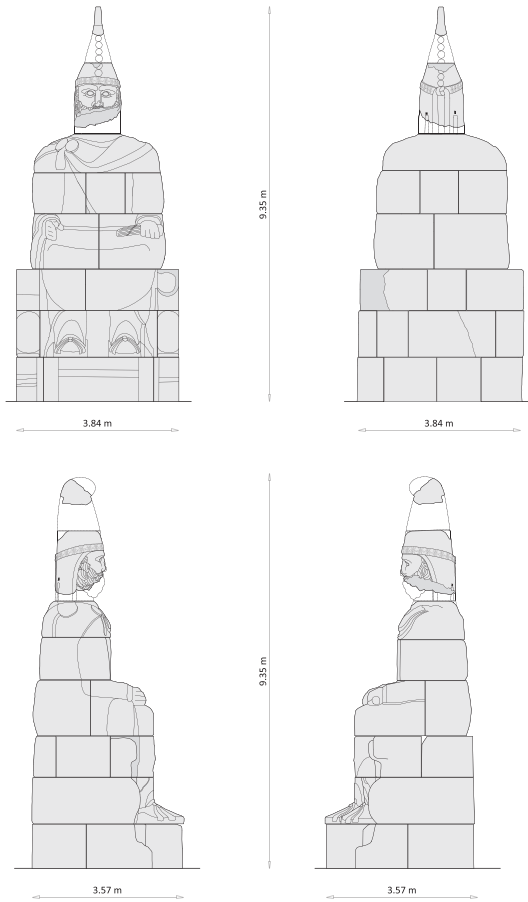


Figure 2.12 Nemrud Dağ, East Terrace, statue of Zeus-Oromasdes, reconstruction drawing.

there is the tumulus and, like on the East Terrace, in total five colossal statues flanked by the eagle/lion pair can be reconstructed with certainty. (Fig. 2.18) Due to earthquakes, all statues have tumbled down; their blocks lay scattered on the terrace. (Fig. 2.19) Five large stelai, the so-called Lion horoscope and four *dexiosis* stelai showing the king shaking hands with each of the four gods, are standing next to the row of statues to the north. (Fig. 2.20) These five stelai were flanked at both sides by a lion/eagle pair as well. Here the south and – contrary to the East Terrace – the west sides are occupied by bases for tuffit stelai with altars in front of them. The south side originally consisted of an orthostate wall of fifteen stelai showing the paternal, Persian ancestors; the western side showed the seventeen Macedonian and Seleucid ancestors. Figure 2.21 shows one of the most

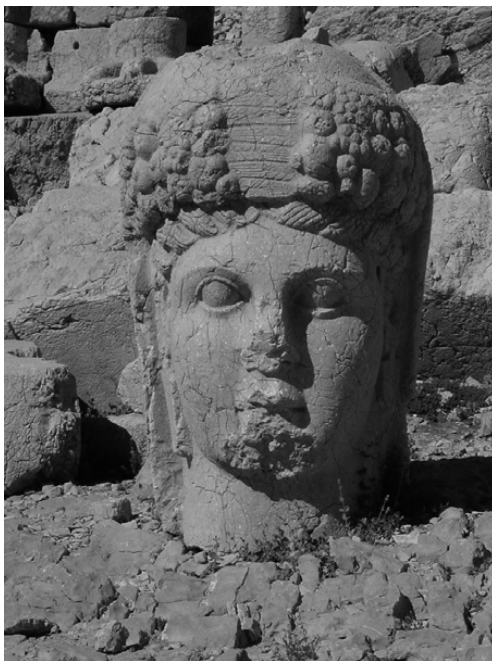


Figure 2.13 Nemrud Dağ, East Terrace, personification of Commagene, with cornucopia, situation in 2004.

complete preserved stelai and displays Xerxes I. The northern side provides an access to the northern and the eastern terraces. Here Goell reconstructed several “coronation” stelai like on the East Terrace. Also at this north side, at the beginning of the slope, there was a large statue of a lion standing on a platform. A path runs behind the stelai and the statues along the east side, similar to that on the East Terrace. To the west, the circular path around the tumulus is hewn out from the rock. The main entrance to the terrace was the processional road coming from the direction of Arsameia; fragments of an entrance stele had been preserved, as well as its socle. (Fig. 2.10)

The disposition of the colossal statues is identical to the East Terrace. There are only a few differences in the details of clothing and rendering faces: the male figures wear the Persian *tiara*; Antiochos I wears one in the Armenian fashion. (Fig. 2.22) As stated, a series of sculptures is placed at the north side of the colossi; they show a king in Persian attire on the left shaking hands with a deity on the right in the *dexiosis* ritual. The first, most northern stele shows a king shaking hands with Commagene; the king’s attire is adorned with lions and fruits, especially pomegranates. The second

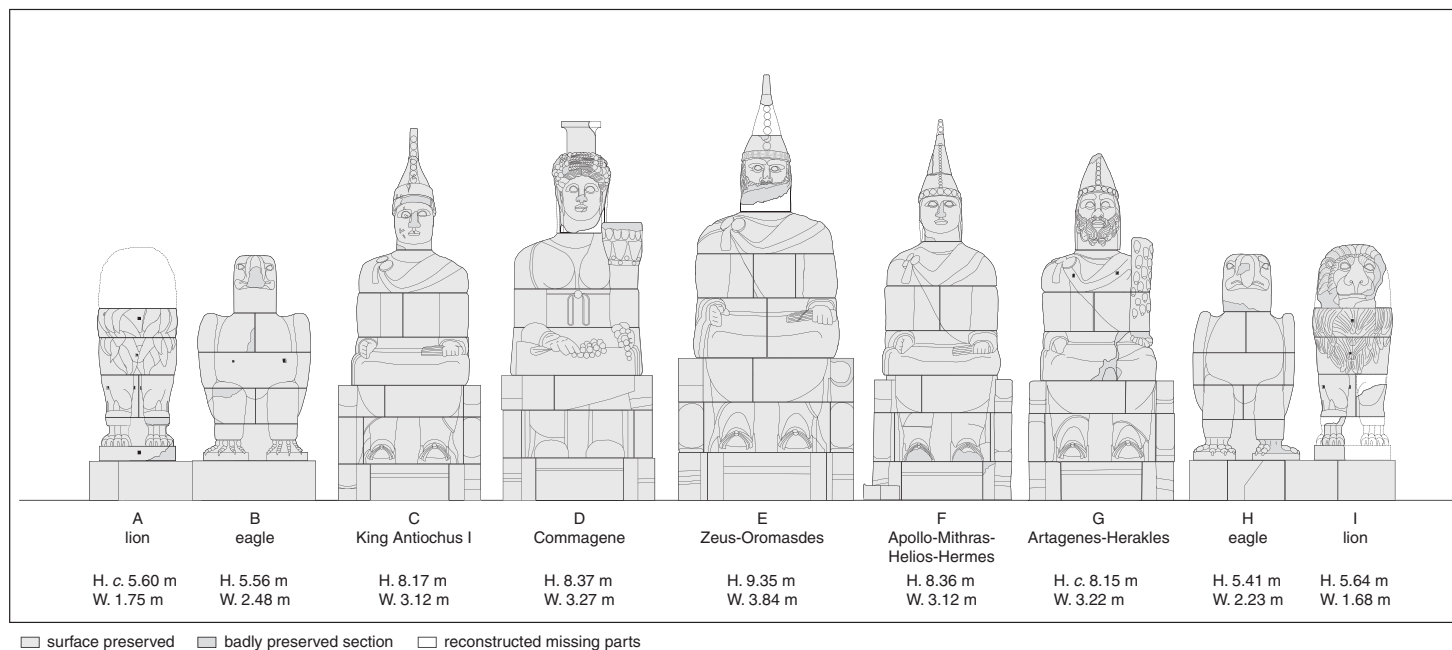


Figure 2.14 Nemrud Dağ, East Terrace, a reconstruction drawing of the lined-up statues.

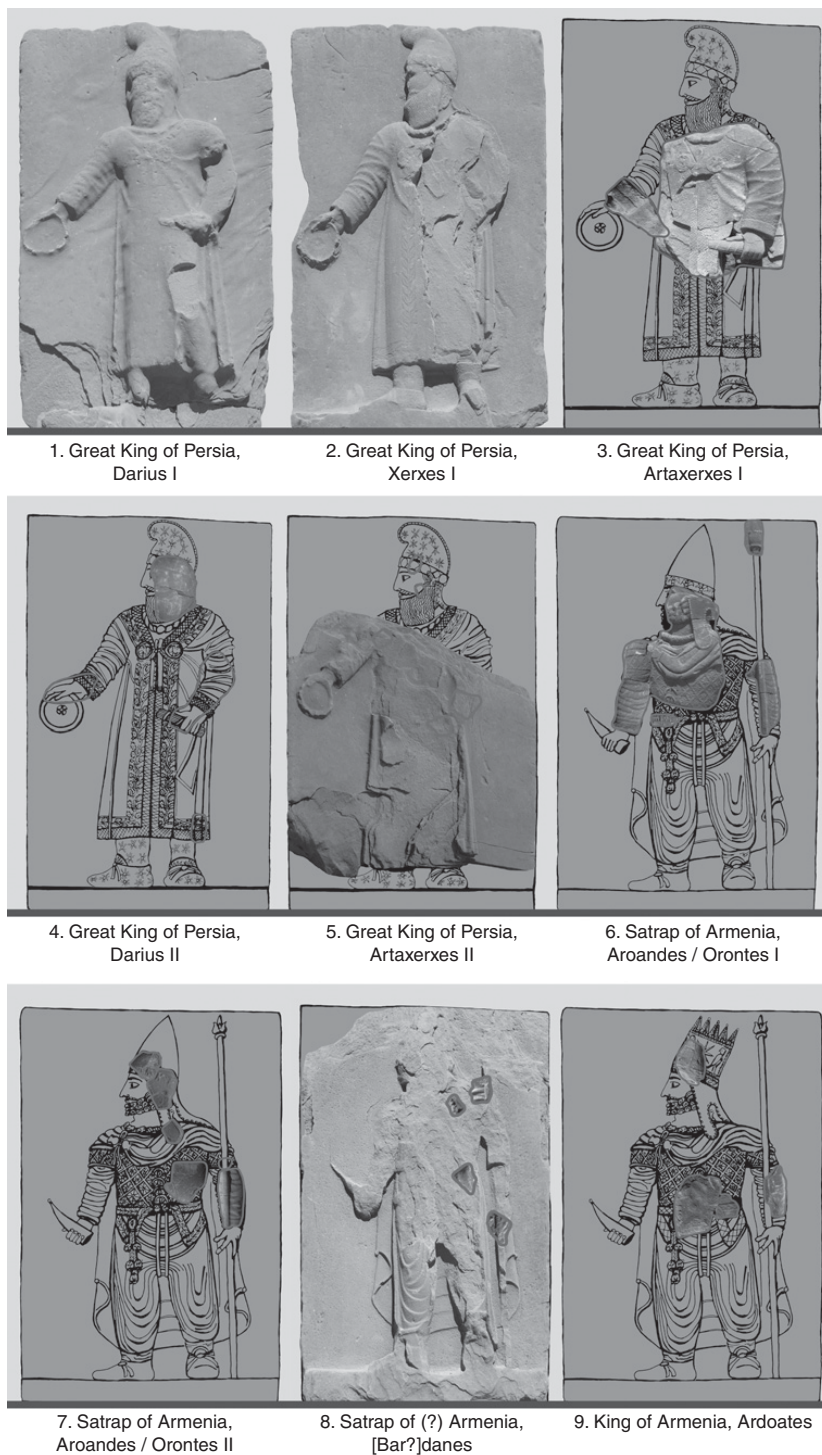


Figure 2.15 Nemrud Dağ, East Terrace, gallery of Persian ancestors (reconstruction drawing, showing preserved fragments).

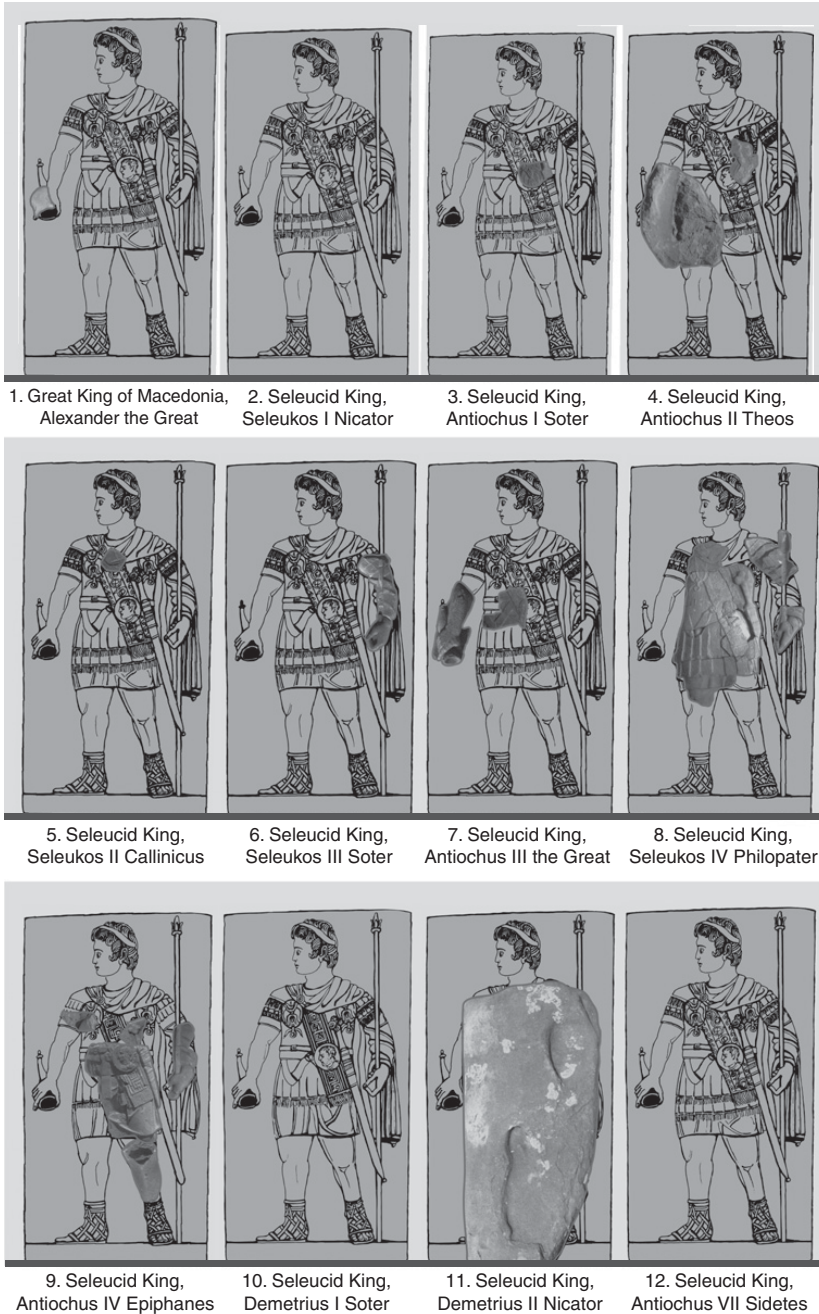


Figure 2.16 Nemrud Dağ, East Terrace, gallery of Seleucid and Macedonian ancestors (reconstruction drawing, showing preserved fragments).

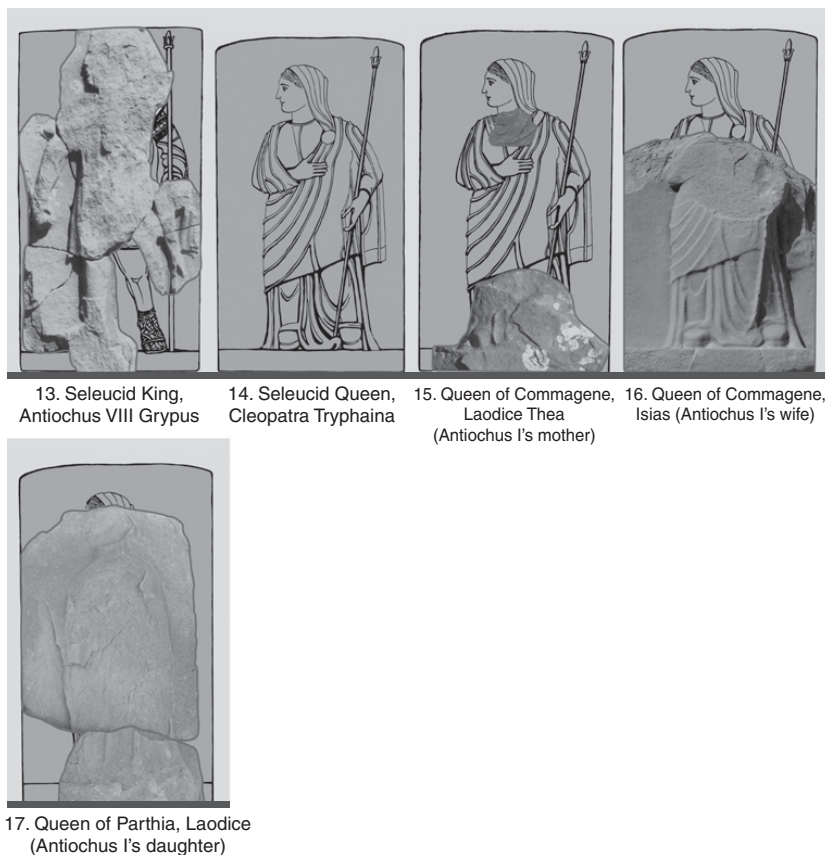


Figure 2.16 (cont.)

dexiosis stele shows the king (wearing a *tiara* with five feathers on top and a rich adornment of lions) and Apollo-Mithras who wears a starred Phrygian cap around which a sunburst with sixteen points is shining. (Fig. 2.23) On the third and largest slab Zeus is enthroned on a mighty seat with animal-shaped front legs. The *tiara* of Zeus is adorned with stars and, along the outline, beads. A series of thunderbolts runs along the lower edge. The king's *tiara* has five feathers on top and its upper part has a thunderbolt and the foliate motive of oak leaves and glands. A diadem with winged thunderbolts is seen underneath. On the fourth stele Herakles holds his lion skin and his club near his left flank. (Fig. 2.24) Details of the king's dress are worn off, but he must have had a lion and wine leaves as adornment on his dress. The stele with the Lion horoscope is the most famous piece. (Figs. 2.25 and 2.26) The animal strides to the right but turns its head with open muzzle and jutting tongue to the onlooker. A moon

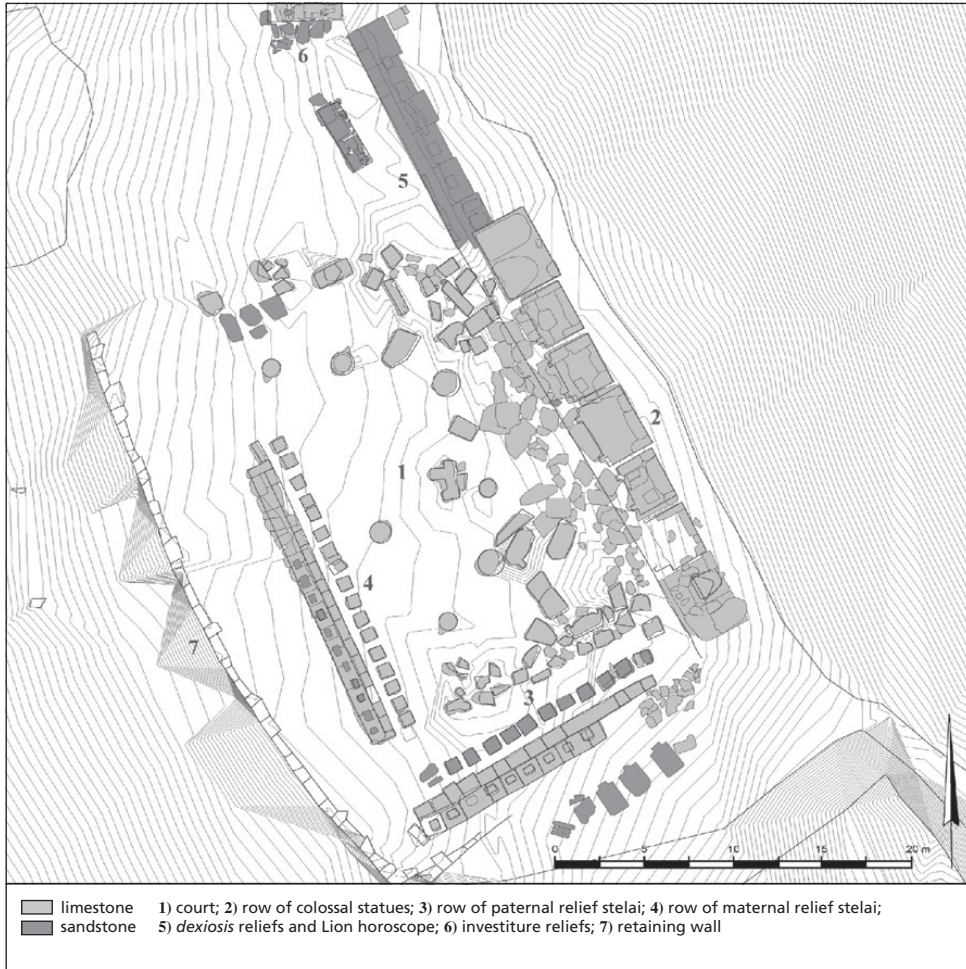


Figure 2.17 Plan of Nemrud Dağ, West Terrace, actual situation. 1. Court, 2. Row of colossal statues, 3. Paternal relief stelai, 4. Maternal relief stelai, 5. *Dexiosis* reliefs and Lion horoscope, 6. Coronation reliefs, 7. Retaining wall.

crescent covers his chest. Eight-pointed stars are scattered over the surface; three stars with sixteen points (in fact the planets Jupiter, Mercury and Mars) are shining across the back of the animal. They have their names written along the upper edge. The positions of the nineteen stars represent the constellation of Lion and the relief thus is the frozen picture of the positions of the heavenly bodies at a certain moment at a certain date.

The so-called North Terrace is the pass way between the East Terrace and the West Terrace, where a large series of unworked stelai lies on the ground. (Fig. 2.27) They correspond to fifty-seven sockets; there are no altars here.

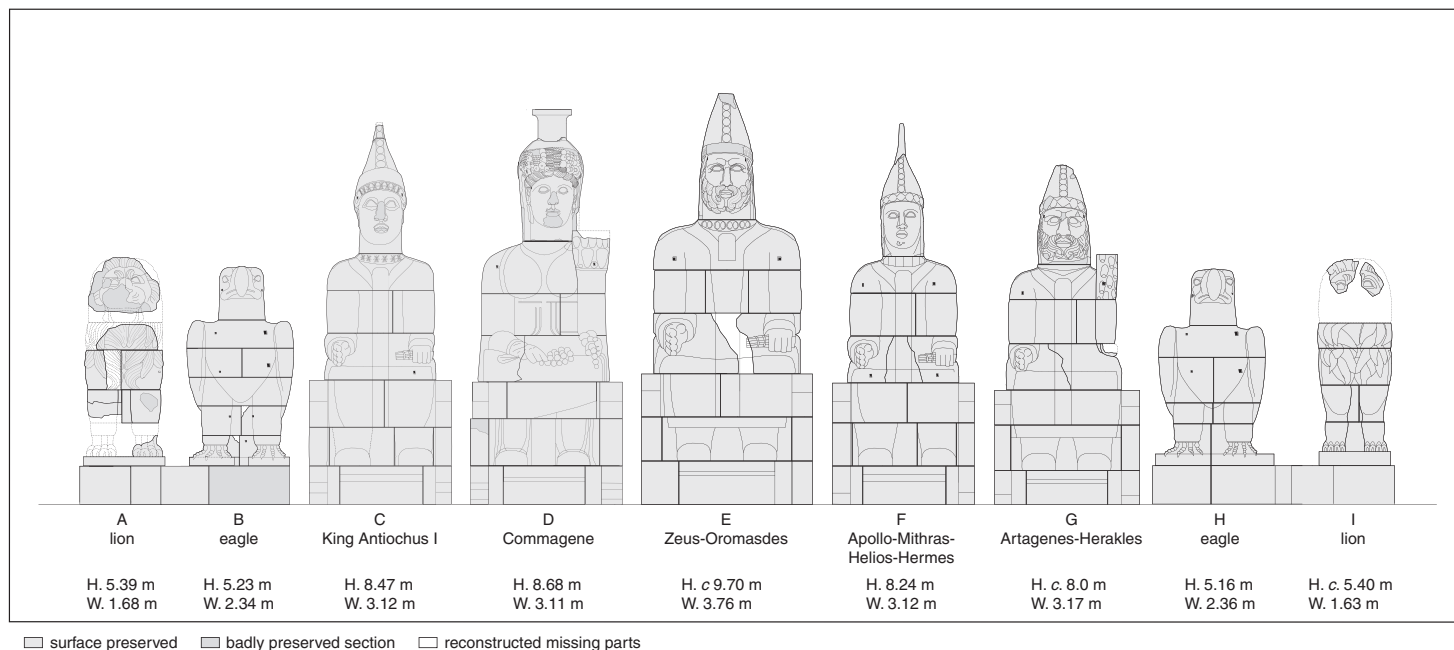


Figure 2.18 Nemrud Dağ, West Terrace, a reconstruction drawing of the lined-up statues.



Figure 2.19 Nemrud Dağ, West Terrace, overview, situation in 2004.



Figure 2.20 Nemrud Dağ, West Terrace, Lion horoscope and *dexiosis* stele, situation in 2004.



Figure 2.21 Nemrud Dağ, West Terrace, Persian ancestor stele displaying Xerxes I, in situ, 2003.

Together, the sockets form a continuous plinth in which two pass-throughs have been made. At the north side, near the East Terrace, a rectangular structure in tuffit can be discerned. On this platform stood a large guarding eagle of which only fragments remain. Here, following one of the pass-throughs in the long plinth, a road led down to the valley. Traces of it can clearly be discerned based on the hewings in the rock. A stele lying in the valley below the North Terrace probably served as an entrance stele. (Fig. 2.10)

Most scholars now believe that the *hierothesion* was built towards the end of the reign of Antiochos I (roughly in the period 50–36 BC), that it has not been finished as planned (or at least in a hurried manner) and that it probably never really functioned. That is to say: the archaeological remains testify to a design and an intention – the layout of a dynastic and religious programme; they do not show a cult location in use.⁶¹

⁶¹ For instance, very little artefacts (be it votives or cult paraphernalia) have been found on or around the site (almost none) and we can say nothing about its relative chronology or occupation. Brijder (*Brijder* 114 ff.) provides an overview of the different opinions on this matter; he argues that it is probable that the sanctuary *was* finished.



Figure 2.22 Nemrud Dağ, West Terrace, head of the statue of Antiochos I, 2003.

Horik is on the route of the “processional road” from Arsameia ad Nymphaeum to Nemrud Dağ, and from this point the Nemrud Dağ tumulus would have been clearly visible.⁶² There may have been a small cult place at the site. A rock-cut stele podium that has been fragmentarily preserved shows an inscription that calls visitors to prayer.

The site of **Arsameia ad Nymphaeum** (Eski Kahta) lies 15 kilometres south-west of Nemrud Dağ.⁶³ The excavations at Arsameia were triggered by the chance find of a remarkable inscription in 1951, near Eski Kale at the Nymphaeum, a tributary of the Euphrates. While passing through a village, Dörner heard about the discovery of a decorated stone which turned out to be the upper part of a relief showing Mithras Helios.⁶⁴ After a second fragment was found, Dörner also noticed a rock that had been artificially smoothed, and after cleaning it he discovered a beautifully preserved Greek text. (Fig. 2.28) The inscription is in columns and states that it was located

⁶² Wagner 1987, 102–107.

⁶³ Dörner/Goell 1963; Waldmann 1973, 82–97; Dörner 1978a; Hoepfner 1983; Hoepfner 2000; Cohen 2006, 152–153 sv. Arsameia on the Nymphaios; Blömer/Winter, 76–87.

⁶⁴ On his discovery see Dörner/Goell 1963, 24–25.



Figure 2.23 Nemrud Dağ, West Terrace, (left) *dexiosis* stele, depicting Antiochos I and Apollo-Mithras; (right) cast by Humann, 1883.

inside a *hierotherision* for a king who, until then, had only been known by name from other Commagenean monuments: Mithridates I Kallinikos. It is believed that his son, Antiochos I, renovated the place and decreed that both he and his father should be venerated there. The inscription contains cult regulations with, amongst other things, proscriptions, punishments and rewards. The text states that the *hierotherision* was located in a suburb of the royal residence of Arsameia, a city that had been unknown until then. Dörner suspected that the royal palace would have been located at the spot where there are extensive remains of a medieval castle (Yeni Kale), and that the city proper was overbuilt by the present-day village (Eski Kahta).

To explore this theory three campaigns were executed in 1953, 1954 and 1956 on the “*hierotherision* plateau”: a strategically located flattened hilltop at 892 metres.⁶⁵ They found that there was a platform with a large *dexiosis*

⁶⁵ In these campaigns Dörner worked together with Goell. In 1953 and 1954 they started working in Arsameia in July and August, then moved to Nemrud Dağ in August and September, to return again to Arsameia in September and October. Earlier Dörner and Goell had agreed on a division between Arsameia (for the Germans) and Nemrud (for the Americans); see *Dörner/Goell 1963*, 23–24.

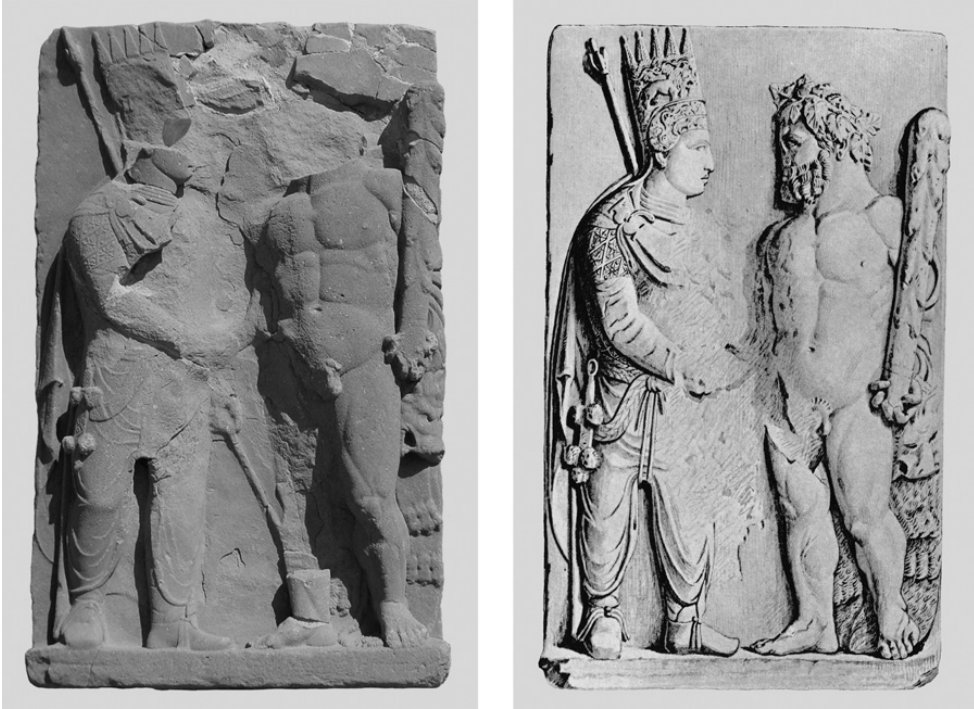


Figure 2.24 Nemrud Dağ, West Terrace, (left) *dexiosis* stele, depicting Antiochos I and Artagnes-Herakles; (right) cast by Humann, 1883.

relief showing the king and Herakles placed above the inscription. (Fig. 2.29) Underneath the inscription there appeared to be a corridor going down the mountain, which could be reached by steps. The German team conducted a difficult and time-consuming clearance, whereby the only archaeological remains discovered were carbonised wood. They found that the corridor appeared to stop abruptly after 158.1 metres. Dörner ascribes a cultic function to this *Felstunnel*.⁶⁶ Several trenches on the plateau of the Eski Kale revealed remains from the late Hellenistic period. (Figure 2.30 presents an overview of the hill and the various remains that have been found.) The most eye-catching finds were a colossal foot that must have been part of a colossal statue, and several mosaic floors, but there were also Rhodian amphorae and other ceramics. The Hellenistic layer was only unearthed on the western and southern side of the plateau. Armenian and Arabic layers were excavated at the northern side of it,

⁶⁶ See Allgöwer 1993, 270–272 for an overview of the various interpretations that have been proposed.



Figure 2.25 Nemrud Dağ, the Lion horoscope as it was uncovered by Theresa Goell in the 1950s.



Figure 2.26 Nemrud Dağ, Lion horoscope.



Figure 2.27 Nemrud Dağ, so-called North Terrace, overview, situation in 2004.

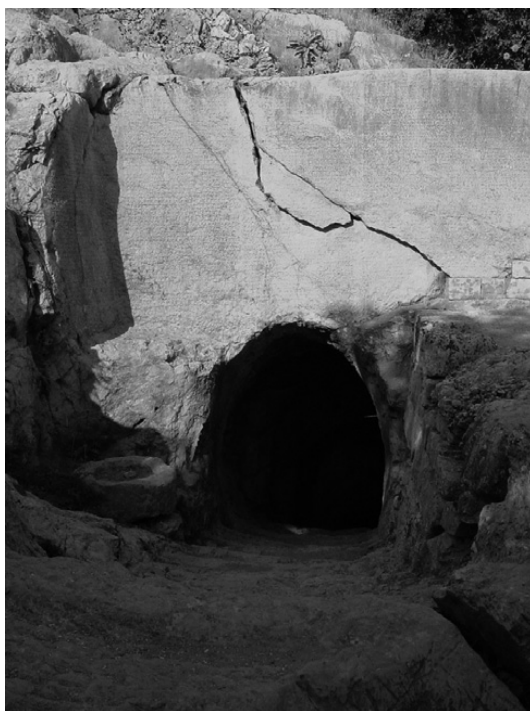


Figure 2.28 Arsameia ad Nymphaeum, the cult inscription discovered by Friedrich Karl Dörner, situation in 2004.



Figure 2.29 Arsameia ad Nymphaeum, *dexiosis* stele depicting Antiochos I and Herakles, situation in 2004.



Figure 2.30 The hill of Arsameia ad Nymphaeum, overview. 1. Upper plateau where the *hierotheresion* would have been situated, 2. *Dexiosis* stele with Antiochos I and Artagnes-Herakles, 3. Cult inscription and tunnel, 4. *Socket* 2 with *dexiosis* Antiochos I and Mithras, 5. Rock hall/*Felsenhalle*, 6. *Socket* 1, 7. Burial chambers, 8. Prehistoric cave.

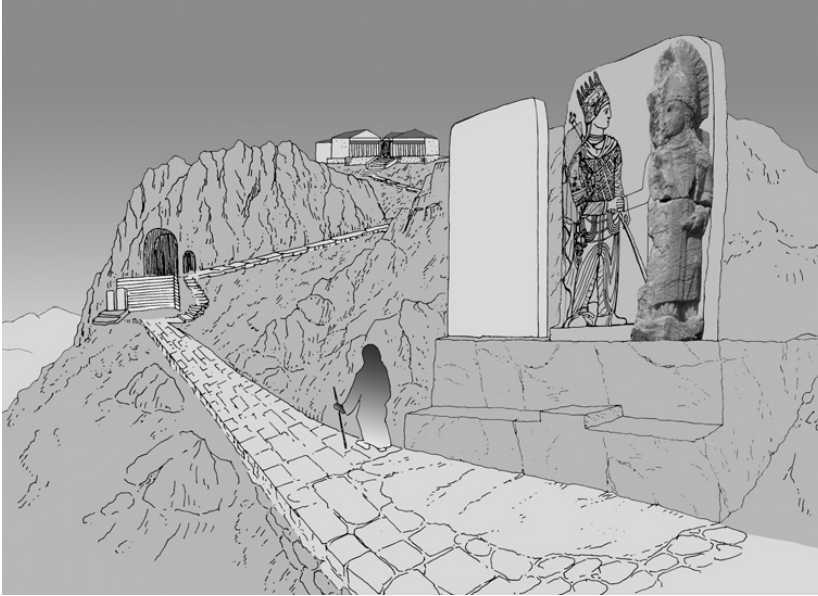


Figure 2.31 Arsameia ad Nymphaeum, late Hellenistic period, reconstruction from *Sockel II* going up.

which mainly revealed storage rooms; some trenches showed the existence of a Hellenistic layer underneath. Built architectural remains are almost absent; only the remains of an ashlar wall were found. Dörner explains that the absence of built architecture may be due to the practice of taking *spolia* and suggests that it is possible that the (now destroyed) twelfth-century church of the nearby monastery of Barsaumā was constructed from these “white stones.”⁶⁷ The sanctuary could be reached by marked processional roads. There were so-called *Sockelanlagen* on the hill itself: terraces that were cut from the rock or artificially created by monumental ashlar walls with large reliefs and texts, to be used as a kind of “station” when going up the mountain. In this vein, rooms cut from the rock are interpreted as “entrance halls.”⁶⁸ (Fig. 2.31) The first “station” (*Sockel II*) consisted of a Mithras *dexiosis* on a platform cut out from the rock. The second “station” (*Sockel I*) had two life-size reliefs with men in oriental attire, probably Mithridates I Kallinikos and Antiochos I, and a large, 9 m high *Felsenhalle*

⁶⁷ As no remains of these *spolia* have been reported or found, however, this must remain a very intriguing idea without any proof.

⁶⁸ One gets a fine impression through the reconstruction sketches by Hoepfner (Hoepfner 1983, Abb. 28–31), although in general his interpretations and reconstructions of the archaeological evidence should be handled with care; see the just criticism in Brijder.



Figure 2.32 Arsameia ad Nymphaeum, relief at *Socket I*, depicting Antiochos I in oriental attire, situation in 2004.

that must have been visible from afar, and was blocked by a blind wall. (Figure 2.32 shows the relief depicting, probably, Antiochos I in oriental attire.) *Socket III* is the entrance to the tunnel with the inscription around it, and the Herakles *dexiosis*, already illustrated in Figures 2.28 and 2.29.

It becomes clear when studying the publication by Dörner and Goell from 1963 that the excavation was driven by the remarkable discovery of the ancient text and the information it provided about the topography of the site. Further excavations were undertaken from 1963 to 1967, and published by Hoepfner in 1983.⁶⁹ These investigations confirmed the impression that the site had been completely destroyed, but nevertheless some observations could be made about the architecture and its

⁶⁹ For a (much more detailed) summary and reappraisal of the German campaigns in Arsameia ad Nymphaeum, see *Brijder*, 238–271 (on Dörner’s work in the 1950s) and 272–297 (on Dörner and Hoepfner’s work in the 1960s). Brijder convincingly presents serious criticism, especially where it concerns the reconstructions and interpretations of Hoepfner, as well as many new suggestions.

decorations. A large flight of stairs was excavated at the west side of the plateau with adjoining walls, originally decorated with stucco painting, and mosaic floors of a large mansion. Perhaps a peristyle should be reconstructed behind these rooms; it has not been preserved due to the collapse of this part of the mountain. Fragmented building elements from local *tufa* were found across the entire plateau. On the basis of a careful analysis of these, Hoepfner reconstructed a large number of Doric pillars, which would have served as *Denkmalträger* (supports of statues or other monuments). The overall reconstruction of this part of the plateau shows a monumental flight of stairs leading to a propylon and a large mansion behind it, of which only some mosaic floors have been preserved. Life-size ancestor statues and animals would have been displayed on terraces in front of this palace-villa, flanking the upper stairs. A room was cut from the rock 20 m east of the stairs. Only the basement has been preserved; therefore the function of the building proper cannot be reconstructed: Hoepfner thought that it was most likely a cistern. At the eastern side of the plateau a large terrace was levelled. The Hellenistic phase is totally destroyed here but, according to Hoepfner, the actual centre of the *hierotherision* was here.⁷⁰ Based on the Arsameia text, the layout of other *hierotherisia* and some archaeological remains found elsewhere on the plateau, Hoepfner tentatively reconstructed a mausoleum, a row of colossi and an altar. In addition to the colossal foot already mentioned, many smaller fragments of colossi were found. The colossi were less schematic and more naturalistic than those of Nemrud Dağ. Hoepfner suggested that the standing figures may have consisted of many blocks: possibly around thirty, compared to ten or eleven for the Nemrud Dağ statues.

No traces whatsoever have been found of the royal palaces thought to have been on Yeni Kale, or of the habitations of the population.⁷¹

It is apparent that part of the Antiochan architecture was destroyed by fire, as witnessed by the stratigraphy and traces of heavy fire on some of the sculpted remains. By the early first century AD, there was already a new building phase on the *hierotherision* plateau. The remains at the west side, at the end of the monumental stairs, were integrated into an imperial building phase which constituted quite a monumental building; at the northern and eastern sides there were many store rooms around a courtyard. Hellenistic *spolia* were used intensively. Hoepfner believed that this complex was a farmstead,

⁷⁰ Hoepfner (Hoepfner 1983, 35) is confident and states: “Es besteht kaum ein Zweifel daran” (“There is hardly any doubt about it”).

⁷¹ Cf. Hoepfner 1983, 58: “Das Wohngebiet der Bevölkerung wird reinen Dorfcharakter gehabt haben” (“The population will have lived in village-like settlements”).



Figure 2.33 Arsameia ad Euphratem, relief of Samos II, situation in 2004.

which was apparently destroyed in the third century AD. Later traces of occupation date to the sixth century AD and to the Mameluk period.

The other Arsameia lies to the east, at the Euphrates, and is called **Arsameia ad Euphratem** (Gerger Kalesi). This hilltop overlooking the Euphrates and the surrounding landscape is a strategic location that has long been used for human occupation.⁷² We know that it was used during the Commagenean period due to an enormous rock-cut relief of Samos II, made in the period of Antiochos I. (Fig. 2.33) Antiochos' grandfather is depicted in Commagenean attire with a pointed cap. An inscription records the existence of *hierotheresia* at this site, in a cult location for a goddess called Argandene. The inscription suggests that two members of the royal family were buried here and mentions that the sanctuary belonged to the city of Arsameia. Arsames was one of Antiochos I's ancestors. According to Dörner this suggests that Arsames founded the city and the sanctuary, and that Antiochos I later brought a priest to the

⁷² Humann/Puchstein 1890, 355; Dörner 1939a, 17–29; Waldmann 1973, 123–141; Dörner 1987, 32–33; Facella 2006, 205–208; Cohen 2006, 152 sv. Arsameia on the Euphrates; Blömer/Winter, 68–75; Brijder, 222–228.



Figure 2.34 Karakuş, overview, situation in 2004.

site. The inscription was first published by Humann and Puchstein and subsequently studied by Dörner. There appears to have been a corridor cut into the rock, similar to Arsameia ad Nymphaeum.

In the thirteenth century, Gerger Kalesi formed part of the northern border of the Mameluk Empire; extensive remains of the Mameluk castle are still present. There are many pottery sherds lying at the surface of the site, which demonstrate the site was occupied between those periods and afterwards.⁷³

The monument of **Karakuş** consists of a burial mound approximately 30 m high and is located in the valley near the Chabinas.⁷⁴ There originally were sets of two (over 7 m high) pillars, crowned with animal statues and *dexiosis* reliefs, on three sides of the mound. At the south side one pillar has been preserved, topped by a 2.5 m high statue of an eagle. (See Figure 2.34 – the partly collapsed burial chamber is visible in the background.) On the north-eastern side both pillars have survived. One has a partly preserved statue of a bull, while the other has a Greek inscription preserved on the upper drums stating that king Mithridates II buried his mother Isias, his sister Antiochis and her daughter in this tumulus. On the

⁷³ Dörner/Naumann 1939, 86–91.

⁷⁴ Humann/Puchstein 1890; Waldmann 1973, 56–57; Dörner 1975b, 60–63; Wagner 1983, 209–210; Facella 2006, 303–306; Blömer/Winter, 96–99; Brijder, 206–217.



Figure 2.35 Karakuş, pillar with *dexiosis* north-west of the tumulus, situation in 2004.

north-western side a pillar with a worn *dexiosis* on top (and another Greek inscription on the drums) has been preserved (Fig. 2.35); the head of a lion that originally decorated the second column is still at the site.⁷⁵ This is a mausoleum for the Antiochan dynasty, built by Antiochos I's successor. It appears that it was not combined with a cult location; this was a monumental tomb and not a temple-tomb. A deep depression at the south side suggests that the mound was robbed. Dörner's investigations demonstrated that there was a burial chamber made of limestone slabs, but it had collapsed and was filled with debris, which suggests that the tomb raiders succeeded. Dörner suggested that this occurred already in the second century AD, when the Roman legions building the nearby Chabinas (Cendere) bridge were in need of building material.⁷⁶

Charles Crowther and Facella have recently suggested that Mithridates II used the *dexiosis* here in the Greek sense, namely to symbolise a separation. This forms part of the argument that Karakuş had a "different physiognomy" to the Antiochan monumental contexts and that it would not have been intended as an "Antiochan" tomb

⁷⁵ Crowther/Facella 2003, 67–68.

⁷⁶ For scepticism about Dörner's suggestion, see Blömer 2008, 104 n. 5.

sanctuary.⁷⁷ However, there are many resemblances to the Antiochan standard, and therefore earlier literature sees Karakuş as a somewhat modest application of the Antiochan tradition. Roger Beck published a theory on the astronomical background of the design of the complex.⁷⁸

Unlike the four dynastic monuments discussed above (Nemrud Dağ and Arsameia ad Nymphaeum being the most important and best studied, and Arsameia ad Euphratem and Karakuş) – which are located in the northern part of the kingdom – **Sesönk** lies at the heart of Commagene, 35 kilometres downstream from Samosata. The name Sesönk means “three-stone” in Kurdish.⁷⁹ This burial monument was first documented by Humann and Puchstein. It consists of an almost oval tumulus with a diameter of 35 metres, around which three sets of two pillars were erected, of which only one is still standing. At the north side of the mound a dromos leads into an underground burial chamber, which consists of two undecorated rooms with several simple benches. At the site Humann and Puchstein found the badly preserved sculpture remains of an eagle, a fragment of a statue and a sculpture displaying two sitting figures which they interpreted as a royal couple, with the king holding a barsom in his hands. Humann’s reconstruction sketch shows a set of pillars crowned by an architrave, on which the statue group is placed, flanked by eagle statues. Although this is somewhat tentative – we cannot identify the figures, and the presence of the *tiara* must remain speculative – the impression might be correct. It is clear that Humann and Puchstein understood Sesönk as belonging to the Antiochan domain because of the structural similarities – a tumulus amid columns holding statues, among which an eagle – with monuments like Karakuş. This view has since been widely accepted, and Sesönk is generally described as the burial tomb of Mithridates II. Michael Blömer, however, has recently cast doubt on this interpretation and suggests, with good arguments, that this could well be a tomb from a local aristocracy to be dated to the Roman period.⁸⁰ There are indeed no decisive arguments to interpret Sesönk as being related to other Antiochan monuments. For the moment, therefore, we should conclude that Sesönk does not belong to the category of dynastic monuments; its eccentric location towards these being a supporting argument for this view.

⁷⁷ Crowther/Facella 2003, 67. ⁷⁸ Beck 1999.

⁷⁹ Humann/Puchstein 1890; Dörner 1987, 47–49; Comfort/Ergeç 2001, 41; Blömer 2008; Blömer/Winter, 173–176; Brijder, 199–206.

⁸⁰ Blömer 2008.

2.3.2 Cities

The most important cities of late Hellenistic Commagene (Tille, Samosata, Zeugma/Seleukeia ad Euphratem) were located at the Euphrates. Doliche lies in land, in the southern part of Commagene, about 50 kilometres west of Zeugma; Germanikeia (Caesarea Germanica) lies at the western border of Commagene. (Fig. 1.11)

The site of **Tille** was situated on the west bank of the Euphrates, roughly between Arsameia ad Euphratem and Samosata (see below), at a point where the river flowed north-south and was quite navigable due to a sharp turn a kilometre upstream.⁸¹ This provided a strategic point where it was easy to cross the Euphrates on the natural east-west route. The site was continuously inhabited from the Chalcolithic period onwards, until it was submerged in one of the tributaries of the Atatürk Barrage. During the medieval period Achaemenid and Hellenistic walls were still in (secondary) use.⁸²

Tille Höyük was explored in rescue excavations carried out by the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara from 1979 to 1990. This research concentrated on the tell itself, rather than on the settlement in the river valley. Furthermore, for several practical reasons, it mainly focused on the surviving architectural plans from later periods; the top of the mound was excavated entirely.⁸³ The site consisted of a 20–25 m high tell, with a diameter of about 120–160 m at its base. There was a lower terrace to the southeast and east, which was only occupied from the Middle Ages onwards. On the lower slopes of the river valley there was a flat settlement, with a diameter of approximately 500 m, dating to the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Roman graves and rock-cut tombs have been found scattered around the site.

Towards the end of the Late Bronze Age, Tille was “a small, heavily fortified site controlling an important crossing point of the Euphrates.”⁸⁴ Level X, dating to the period around 500 BC, preserved impressive Achaemenid architectural remains, showing a distinctive collection of Persian features. Therefore, it appears that Tille was already quite an important settlement in the area during that period. Conclusions on the Hellenistic and Roman periods are currently provisional, as the final report has not yet been published. However, it appears that it had become a small

⁸¹ Özdoğan 1977, 92 sv. S 52/11; French/Moore/Russell 1982; Blaylock 1998b; Moore 1993; Summers 1993; Lightfoot 1996. For an extensive introduction to the setting see Moore 1993, 1–3.

⁸² Moore 1993, 21. ⁸³ The medieval occupation phase is published in Moore 1993.

⁸⁴ Summers 1993, 2.

town with a citadel, and occupation concentrated in the lower river valley settlement.⁸⁵ It is possible that this was the town **Charmodara** on the Peutinger map. Finds from this period include a large number of mould-made figurines. A bathhouse was built in the Roman period. Stamped tiles prove the presence of the *Ala Flavia Agrippina*; however, so far no military remains have been located. Roman watchtowers have been preserved south of Tille, one of which has been excavated (see below). No remains of the Antiochan Bildprogramm have been found at Tille.

Samosata (Samsat), the ancient capital of Commagene, was located on a wide plain between the Euphrates to the west and a mountainous area to the east.⁸⁶ (Fig. 2.36) This strategic position made it an important north-south crossroad and bridging point for the Euphrates. The history of the site goes back to the Chalcolithic period. It was the capital of Kummuh during the Hittite and Assyrian periods and later became part of an Assyrian province. It was again the political and economic capital of the region in the Commagenean period, and it is almost certain that the royal family lived here. Antiochos I resisted the Roman army several times from Samosata: in 69 BC against Lucullus, in 66 BC against Pompey and in 38 BC against Mark Antony. After AD 72 it became the base of the *Legio XVI Flavia*; these legionaries fought the Parthians from the city in the second century AD. The famous writer and orator Lucian was born in Samosata around AD 120. In the fourth century AD it was described as a large and heavily populated city. From the sixth century AD onwards it was repeatedly conquered and re-conquered by Arab tribes and Byzantines. Samosata remained one of the most important centres in the region until the end of the Middle Ages. The Samsat flood plain was formed by relatively recent alluvial deposits, which explains the absence of other ancient sites along the river bank.⁸⁷

Humann and Puchstein published archaeological observations of the site. Goell explored Samosata in the 1960s; Özgüç in the years between 1978 and 1989. Rescue excavations were carried out in the 1990s, before the eye-catching tell and the surrounding region were swallowed by the waters of the Atatürk reservoir.

⁸⁵ See Moore/French *forthcoming* for the eagerly awaited final publication.

⁸⁶ Humann/Puchstein 1890, 111; Iacopi 1936, 21 ff.; Dörner/Naumann 1939, 30–43, 54–61; Goell 1969, 83–109; Serdaroğlu 1977, 66–70; Özdoğan 1977, 130–135 sv. T 51/14, T 51/16; Özdoğan et al. 1987, 285–289; Bingöl 1997, 111–118; Tirpan 1989, 519–526; Zoroğlu 2000; Crowther/Facella 2003, 68–71; Cohen 2006, 187–190 sv. Samosata; Blömer/Winter, 142–143; Brijder, 132 ff.

⁸⁷ Özdoğan 1977, 115.

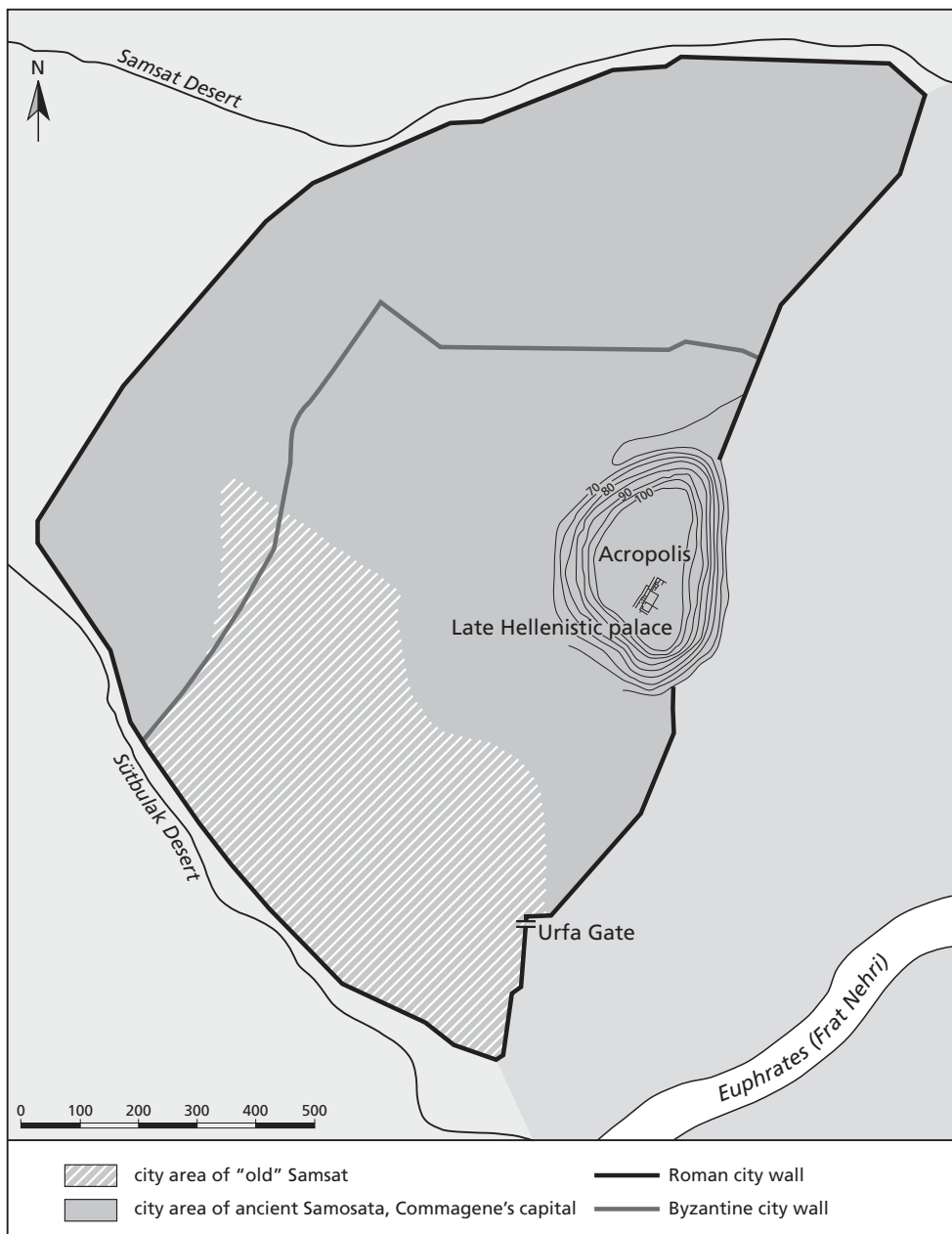


Figure 2.36 Samosata, sketch plan of the topography with the various archaeological remains.

The city's perimeter was nearly 8 kilometres long, with its eastern border along the Euphrates. Remains from the Hellenistic period were discovered by Özgüç and in the final rescue excavations. The most spectacular find was a structure interpreted as "Mithridates Sarayı" – the palace of (king)

Mithridates. Unfortunately Özgüç's important excavations have not been extensively published.⁸⁸ There were remarkable high-quality mosaics and wall paintings, which suggest that Commagene was, at least in regard to elite culture, part of the eastern Mediterranean Hellenistic *koine*.⁸⁹ However, there is as yet no decisive evidence to prove that this large, richly decorated mansion, reminiscent of complexes like the *Casa del Fauno* in Pompeii or the *Palazzo delle Colonne* in Ptolemais, really was "the palace of Mithridates" (or Antiochos I himself).⁹⁰

In the Roman period the city was fortified and reached its greatest size; the walls were 5.5 kilometres long, and have been partly preserved. In 1967 Goell cleared a gate, its most distinctive feature being the use of *opus reticulatum*. A wooden bridge over the Euphrates would have been built in this period. Remains of a house dating from the Roman period were recorded at the foot of the acropolis on the south side. Around Samosata are impressive remains of large parts of its aqueduct, which would have been built by and for the Roman legion.

Several reliefs and inscriptions related to the programme of Antiochos I have been found in and around Samosata.⁹¹ An Antiochan (inscribed) relief from Samosata was first recorded by the Italian scholar Iacopi in 1935/1936, and was published by Dörner in 1939. The text on the back of the stone equalled the cult inscription of Arsameia ad Euphratem; the front, partly erased, can be compared to the great cult inscription at Nemrud Dağ. Also a *dexiosis* showing Antiochos I and Apollo-Mithras-Helios-Hermes has been preserved with parts of the *nomos* inscribed on the rear and the edges. Found in Selik and perhaps from Samosata or from a *temenos* at Selik itself is the stele showing a *dexiosis* between the king and Artagnes-Herakles with also parts of the *nomos* on the rear and edges; as can be clearly seen it was later used as an olive press. (Fig. 2.37) Very recently a new Commagenean *nomos* text was found in the reserves from

⁸⁸ See, however, the volume *Samsat*, published in Ankara, in Turkish, in 2009, that only recently came to my attention. For interim reports see Özgüç 1985a/b, now with her 2009 book. On these excavations and its results, see the summary in Zoroğlu 2000; Kropp 2013, 107–109; and Brijder, 425–429; these authors do not question the interpretation of the remains as a royal palace. It was only when the manuscript of this book was finished that I discovered a small though extremely important booklet written by Orhan Bingöl, entitled *Samosata. I. Theos Antiokhos Sarayı* (Ankara 2013). Lavishly illustrated, Bingöl, who participated in the excavations himself, presents the fullest account of the excavations so far. Unfortunately, his conclusions and reconstructions of this fascinating complex, that merits much more attention, could not be taken into account any more.

⁸⁹ Thus prudently corroborating, in a general way, the suggestion by Hoepfner from 1975 that the royal palace at Samosata would resemble that of Herod the Great at Massada; see 3.4. For Hellenistic palaces in general, see still Hoepfner/Brands 1996.

⁹⁰ Facella (Facella 2006, 220), however, seems to accept the identification.

⁹¹ Brijder, 132 ff. provides a full and updated overview.



Figure 2.37 Stele with *dexiosis* depicting Antiochos I and Artagnes-Herakles (found in Selik, perhaps from Samosata).

the Adıyaman Museum amidst the finds of the rescue excavations from the years 1978 to 1989, possibly indicating the presence of a separate *temenos* on the city's acropolis.⁹²

Zeugma/Seleukeia ad Euphratem (Belkıs) is probably the best-known archaeological site in Commagenean territory because of its recent rescue excavations.⁹³ The river could be crossed relatively easily here; where the Euphrates flowed closest to the Mediterranean. Ceramics show that the site was occupied during the Bronze Age. Around 300 BC, Seleukos I Nikator,

⁹² Crowther/Facella 2011.

⁹³ Wagner 1976; Kennedy 1998; Ergeç/Önal/Wagner 2000; Comfort/Abadie-Reynal/Ergeç 2000; Comfort/Ergeç 2001; Cohen 2006, 190–196 sv. Seleukeia on the Euphrates/Zeuğma; Blömer/Winter, 301–325.

the first Seleucid king, founded two cities here which he named after his wife and after himself: Apameia on the Euphrates (on the east bank) and Seleukeia on the Euphrates (on the west bank). Seleukeia became one of the most important cities of the Commagenean kingdom. In the Roman period, when the city was known as Zeugma, it was the main point of contact between Rome and Parthia, and developed into a strategic *limes* stronghold where the *Legio IV Scythica* was based. Zeugma, meaning “link” or “bridge” in Greek, was the main crossing in the area, but by no means the only one. It is likely that there was never a fixed bridge due to the frequently destructive floods. Therefore, the Euphrates crossing should be envisaged as a bridge consisting of pontoons or boats. The city was destroyed by the Sassanids in AD 256 and was slowly abandoned. By the beginning of the fourth century AD only the necropolis was still used.

Until a few decades ago, archaeological remains from the site were mainly found through illegal excavations; in the nineteenth century mosaics said to come from Belkis found their way into European collections. Wagner devoted a fundamental monograph to Hellenistic and Roman Zeugma in 1976. This book provided the first evidence that ancient Zeugma was located at Belkis: until then the city was thought to be located opposite Samosata. Wagner discovered part of a *dexiosis* relief, which strongly suggested that, at least for some time, Zeugma belonged to Antiochan Commagene. Moreover, he documented the remains of a large cult statue of Tyche and the extensive necropolis around the city. The site was explored and partly excavated on a large scale from the 1990s onwards, before it was slowly submerged by the water of the Birecik Dam reservoir. This rescue work uncovered a Bronze Age cemetery,⁹⁴ as well as Commagenean remains. However, the majority of the archaeological remains unearthed date to the Roman phase of the first and second centuries AD.⁹⁵ The city particularly flourished as an important Euphrates crossing during the *Pax Romana* in the second century AD.

Two *dexiosis* reliefs were found in Zeugma.⁹⁶ The first was discovered by Wagner and shows a large relief of Antiochos I and Herakles (about 3 × 2 m), but does not include any text.⁹⁷ It is comparable to the relief in

⁹⁴ The Bronze Age cemetery was published in Sertok/Ergeç 1999.

⁹⁵ The literature mentioned above only lists synthesising articles and books. Previous or more specific bibliographic references can be found there. From 1996 onwards interim reports on the recent rescue work are published by C. Abadie-Reynal, R. Ergeç and others in *Anatolia Antiqua*.

⁹⁶ Herman Brijder (personal communication 2012) informs me that a third *dexiosis* from Zeugma (showing Antiochos I and Herakles, hewn from black basalt, almost complete and with a long inscription) has been preserved in the Gaziantep Museum.

⁹⁷ Wagner 1975, 52. Cf. further Wagner 1976, 117–123 and Wagner 1983, 191.



Figure 2.38 Zeugma, *dexiosis* depicting Antiochos I and Apollo.

Arsameia ad Nymphaeum. In 2000 a second *dexiosis* was found, which depicts Apollo with a radiant crown.⁹⁸ (Fig. 2.38) The relief had been well preserved – only the upper part is lost. There are 40 lines of text on the back, showing part of the royal inscriptions. The same excavation unearthed a limestone block with part of that same inscription, which had been reused in a Byzantine wall. All these documents enable the reconstruction of a *temenos* (or even more *temene*) in Zeugma, the location of which cannot be determined.⁹⁹

The city of **Doliche** (Dülük), about 50 kilometres west of Zeugma, is well known as the place of origin of a male high god that would be associated with Iupiter Optimus Maximus to develop into Iupiter Dolichenus, a celestial divinity that was venerated widely in the Roman Empire during

⁹⁸ Crowther 2003 (more extensively Crowther/Facella 2003) and now Rose 2013.

⁹⁹ For all the epigraphic finds and their implications, see now Crowther 2013, 192–203, in particular.

the imperial period.¹⁰⁰ Depictions of the god clearly show his Near Eastern roots.¹⁰¹ Doliche was probably founded around 300 BC, although human occupation of the site stretches back as far as the Palaeolithic. Its importance in the Hellenistic period is unknown, and is therefore the subject of debate. The only thing we know for sure is that Antiochos I included the city in the diffusion of his *Bildprogramm*, as part of a *dexiosis* relief was found on a hilltop a few kilometres to the south of the city area (Dülük Baba Tepesi). Only the king and part of the great cult inscription can be discerned.¹⁰² We may therefore safely reconstruct a *temenos*, but we do not know what this cult location looked like. Due to its strategic location on the Roman road system, Doliche flourished in the imperial period until the middle of the third century AD. More than a hundred tombs from the necropolis testify to the city's occupation during the Roman period. Doliche was destroyed in the middle of the third century AD, but after that regained some of its importance, until the twelfth century, when Antep became the region's centre.

Recent investigations on Dülük Baba Tepesi have proven the long-standing theory that the main sanctuary of Iupiter Dolichenus stood on that spot. The importance of this research, undertaken from Münster, lies in the fact that while there was ample data on the god outside his hometown, we had almost no information on Iupiter Dolichenus from Doliche itself.¹⁰³ There are remarkable finds from the Achaemenid period. However, the architecture and chronology of the sanctuary are thus far unclear, and it is therefore not possible to draw conclusions on the relationship between the cult of Iupiter Dolichenus and the initiatives by Antiochos I. It appears they were both practised at the same location, but the archaeological evidence seems to be too undetermined to state this with certainty. Interestingly, Doliche has also yielded evidence for the cult of Mithras. Excavations brought to light several caves where the god was worshipped during the first century BC. We lack information about

¹⁰⁰ Wagner 1982; Schwertheim 1991; Ergeç/Wagner 2000; Schütte-Maischatz/Winter 2000; Crowther/Facella 2003, 71; Schütte-Maischatz/Winter 2004a; Blömer/Winter 2005; Winter/Blömer 2006; Cohen 2006, 155–156 sv. Doliche; Blömer/Winter, 248–285.

¹⁰¹ For a catalogue of the archaeological material see Hörig/Schwertheim 1987; this material is updated in a forthcoming article by Michael Blömer. For recent research and novel interpretations, see Collar 2011 and Collar 2013, and above all Blömer/Winter 2012 (with all earlier bibliography).

¹⁰² Wagner 1982, 161.

¹⁰³ See Blömer/Winter 2005 for an overview of the results of the first campaigns and *Kommagenische Forschungen IV* for the results of the years 2007–2009. Blömer/Winter, 267–285, provides a summary.

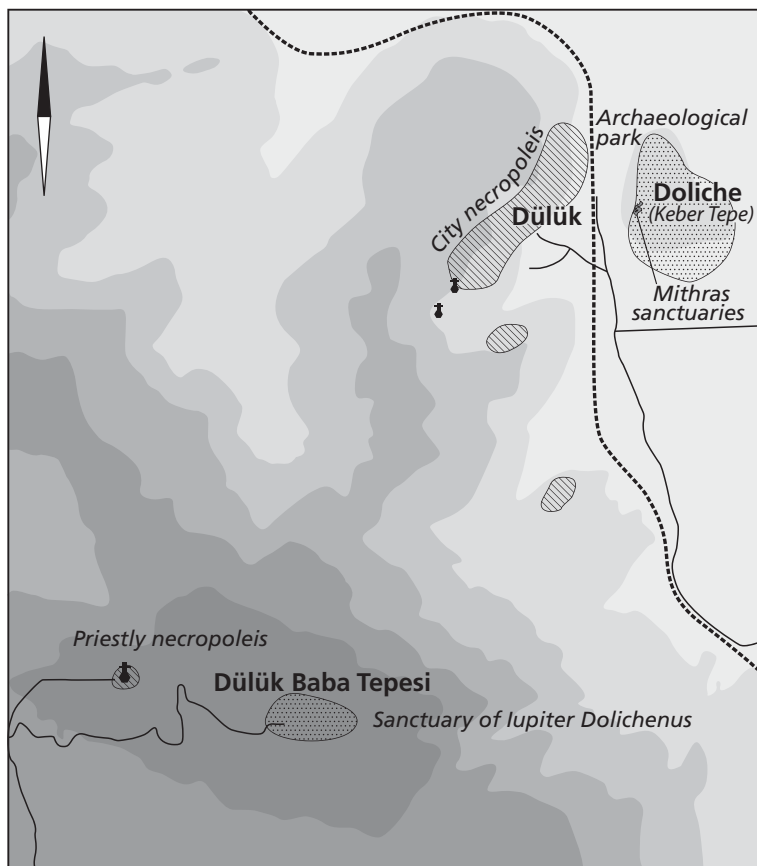


Figure 2.39 Doliche, sketch plan of the topography with the various archaeological remains.

a possible relationship between this Mithras cult and the Mithras cult that was part of Antiochos I's *Bildprogramm*. [Figure 2.39](#) presents an overview of the various sites.

The city of **Germanikeia/Caesarea Germanica** (Maraş) is situated in the (most) western part of Commagene, on the crossroad of the local north-south and east-west routes and near the Amanos Mountains. Its name, inscribed on coins as *kaisareia germanike*, reflects Antiochos IV's gratitude to the emperor who restored his dynasty. An inscription, published by Şahin and dated to the Antiochan era, recalls how the dedicant, a *strategos* called Zarieis (if Şahin's reading of the inscription is correct), made an offering to a local non-Antiochan deity.¹⁰⁴ In the Roman period ancient

¹⁰⁴ Şahin 1991a.

Besni (**Octacuscum**) was a small city, or way-station, on the Roman road from Germanikeia to the east. Rock-cut chamber tombs have been preserved from that period.¹⁰⁵ The city of **Perre** appears to have been much more important in the Roman period. Recent excavations at the site just north of Adıyaman have revealed a huge necropolis with rock-cut chamber tombs dating from the Roman period. No remains of the city itself have been preserved.¹⁰⁶ North of Perre, in the Taurus Mountains, is the rock-cut relief of **Haydaran**.¹⁰⁷ This tomb relief might date to the late Hellenistic period and shows a *dexiosis* between a man and a woman. The iconography betrays oriental influences and might have been inspired by the Antiochan visual language.¹⁰⁸

2.3.3 Villages

Monuments and artefacts have been found at many places in Commagene that, through their specific style and content, can be connected with the ruler cult of Antiochos I. When these are not found as part of dynastic monuments like the *hierothesia* or *mausoleia*, they are usually reconstructed as indicating the presence of a small cult place, often related to a local village. These cult places are called *temenos*. It seems that these *temene* had often been added to sanctuaries that were already in existence.¹⁰⁹ Below, discussions on the *temene* have been made part of a wider overview of (smaller) settlements in Commagene during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.¹¹⁰ Most of these are documented either through field surveys that have been carried out in the region or through Roman-period tombs that have been hewn from the rock. A systematic

¹⁰⁵ Comfort/Ergeç 2001, 41; Blömer/Winter, 177–180.

¹⁰⁶ The site was visited by Humann and Puchstein, and was more thoroughly explored by Dörner and Naumann in 1938. A small fifth-century AD basilica that was preserved with part of its mosaics was published by Candemir and Wagner. Cf. Dörner/Naumann 1939, 66–69; Candemir/Wagner 1978, 229–230; Dörner 1987, 64; Blömer/Winter 2005, 197 n. 27; Blömer/Winter, 128–137. During the last decade, especially the *necropoleis* of the city have been intensively explored; see various contributions to *Kommagenische Forschungen III*.

¹⁰⁷ Blömer/Winter, 138–141. ¹⁰⁸ Blömer 2011.

¹⁰⁹ Schütte-Maischatz 2003, followed by Blömer 2012. Brijder, 132 ff. provides an overview of all the different *temene* and discusses their relation to one another.

¹¹⁰ The exciting new finds from the village of Güzelçay, south of Kahta, were published when the manuscript of this book was already finished and they therefore could not be dealt with. On the basis of these finds it is indeed logical to assume that there was a *temenos* at Güzelçay as well. The evidence of this cult place is most interesting as it shows evidence for the veneration of the ancestors of Antiochos I and shows us the king as the recipient of donations. See the contributions by C. Crowther and M. Facella, and W. Oenbrink, to *Kommagenische Forschungen VI*.

Landesaufnahme – in combination, for instance, with intensive field survey and excavation – is lacking so far. Therefore, we virtually know nothing about most of these settlements. The overview below mainly serves to indicate what kind of archaeological remains we have at our disposal. For practical reasons of description, three zones have been distinguished, from North to South: (1) from the far North to the area around the Cendere/Kahta Çay (the region of the three *hierotherisia* and, at the Euphrates, Tille); (2) from the Cendere/Kahta Çay to the Karasu (the region that had Samosata as its main centre at the Euphrates); and (3) from the Karasu to Zeugma (the south of Commagene, with Doliche as a centre inland). (Fig. 2.4)

2.3.3.1 From the far North to the region around the Cendere/Kahta Çay (ancient Chabinas)

Roman troops were stationed in the most northern part of Commagene, at **Barsalium**. About 20 kilometres south lies **Gerger Kalesi** – better known as Arsameia ad Euphratem (discussed above) – with its remains of the Mameluk castle.

The small village of **Bazık** (near Gerger, between the villages of Yayladalı and Kesertaş Köyleri) is located on a slope between the range of mountains bordering the Euphrates, on which Gerger Kalesi was built, and one of the many Euphrates tributaries. In the village a Roman tomb has been preserved, which was cut from the rock. Pillars are suggested in relief on both sides of the entrance to the chamber, which was originally closed by a stone door. Another relief shows a seated woman holding her right hand to her breast while her left hand rests on her lap. Next to the woman, a ten-line Greek inscription reveals that the deceased was Avidios Antiochos who died at the age of twenty-three. The tomb was first described by E. Huntington in 1901, and in 1903 Lehmann-Haupt argued that the inscription showed that a descendant of Antiochos I was buried here. Dörner rightly rejected this interpretation, as the decoration and character of the tomb resemble many other graves from the Roman period.¹¹¹

Cendere-bridge, the bridge crossing the Chabinas and connecting Samosata and Perre with Melitene (north of the Taurus), is one of the most remarkable monuments that has been preserved from Roman Commagene. (Fig. 2.40) Inscriptions reveal that it was built by the *Legio XVI Flavia firma* in the years AD 198–200, replacing an earlier bridge probably built under Vespasian. It was part of a more extensive building

¹¹¹ Dörner 1939b, 47–51 (with previous literature).



Figure 2.40 Cendere bridge built by Septimius Severus, situation in the 1950s.

programme of Septimius Severus. Three pillars flanking the entrances have been preserved, showing dedicatory inscriptions to the emperor, his wife Iulia Domna and Caracalla. The fourth pillar was originally dedicated to Geta, but suffered from a *damnatio memoriae* under Caracalla: Geta's name has been erased. The bridge was paid for by "the four Commagenean cities," probably Samosata, Perre, Doliche and Germanikeia.¹¹²

Lacotena (Direk Kale) is situated approximately 15 kilometres north-west of Cendere-bridge.¹¹³ Hoepfner suggested that the site contained remains from the Commagenean period: he argued that an Antiochan *temenos* stood on the so-called *Mühlenberg*, a hilltop with a clear view of Nemrud Dağ. One of the scant architectural remains ("einige Trümmer") that he documented in the 1960s on the *Mühlenberg* is dated to the first century BC based on a comparison with similar pieces from Arsameia ad Nymphaeum. The evidence for the reconstruction of a *temenos* is therefore both slight and circumstantial. However, based on our present knowledge it is not illogical to presume that there was an Antiochan *temenos* at this location. Illegal explorations have yielded more architectural building elements. In 2002 a previously unknown inscription was reported dating to the Roman period.¹¹⁴ This neither corroborates nor contradicts the existence of an Antiochan phase.

¹¹² Wagner 1987, 48–55; Blömer/Winter, 91–95. ¹¹³ Hoepfner 1966; Blömer/Winter, 100–105.

¹¹⁴ *Nemrud Dağ Project 2*, 154 with n. 24 and fig. 25, and now Brijder, 421–423.



Figure 2.41 Roman temples from the imperial period as preserved at the site of Direk Kale.

There are impressive remains from the Roman period in the valley, which can be interpreted as a religious centre with three temples. (Fig. 2.41) Building A, a large temple surrounded by a wall with towers, is thought to have been built in the second half of the first century AD. Building B is a small podium temple; building C is too badly preserved for a reconstruction. A partly preserved dedication to Apollo has been dated to the second century AD.¹¹⁵ There are also some remains from the Crusader period. A small modern village has been built next to the Roman temples, but no remains have been found of an ancient settlement. Hoepfner concluded that this was a regional religious centre that was in use during the Roman imperial period.

One of the earliest surveys in Commagenean territory located several settlements on the floodplain of the Kahta Çay, a tributary of the Euphrates. A few hundred metres north-west of the village of Hallan, at a spot called **Arditalye Mevkii**, there was quite a large settlement during the Classical period and the Middle Ages. Sherds were reported in 1977, there are traces of stone walls visible, and there is also a necropolis area and two rock-cut tombs.¹¹⁶ At **Aşağı Kilyan**, near the village of Dardağan, there was probably a small settlement dating to the Middle Ages. Also

¹¹⁵ See Crowther/Facella 2003, 66 with earlier literature. ¹¹⁶ Özdoğan 1977, 108 sv. T 51/3.

a very small number of sherds from the Iron Age and Classical period were found.¹¹⁷ At **Komu Rej** there was a settlement on a flat slope approximately 3 kilometres north-east of Hiniç. From the early Iron Age to the end of the Classical period the site was probably rather small, but in the Byzantine period a larger settlement emerged. The 1977 survey documented traces of stone walls, as well as remains of mosaics that came to light because of illegal excavations. A rock-cut tomb was also discovered next to two small springs.¹¹⁸ Along the Kahta Çay itself, north of the village of Hallan lies **Domuz Deresi Mevkii** where the 1977 survey located a relatively large rock-cut tomb with a quadrangular chamber and three side-chambers.¹¹⁹ **Griki Ağni** is a medium-sized mound on a strategic point near the Kahta Çay and Euphrates convergence, 3 kilometres south-west of Dardağan. The 1977 survey collected surface finds from the Chalcolithic period (“a few doubtful sherds”), to post-Classical periods. The evidence suggests that the main settlement was established during the Iron Age and lasted into the Middle Ages. The site appears to have been most prominent during the Classical period.¹²⁰ **Ismail Harabesi**, another smaller settlement located at the confluence of the Kahta Çay and Euphrates, was inhabited during the Iron Age and the Roman period.¹²¹ At **Ceviz Tarlası Mevkii**, immediately west of the village of Hallan, along the Kahta Çay, the remains of a Roman aqueduct are visible. In 1977 at least ten arches were still standing, all in a poor state of preservation. This stretch is a continuation of the Samosata aqueduct.¹²²

At the Euphrates, **Tille** is the most important site from this area (see 2.3.2 above). At **Karatilbe**, in a valley a few kilometres south of Tille, at least nine rock-cut tombs were documented, probably dating from the Classical or Byzantine periods. A small watchtower that formed part of the Roman frontier defence was excavated in 1979.¹²³ Another Euphrates settlement, **Horis**, is best known for its thirteenth-century AD castle (Horis Kale), situated on a rocky ridge above the Euphrates. It is probable that this site formed an important part of the fortification system along the river from the Iron Age to the end of the Middle Ages. It was also intensively used as a quarry for the surrounding villages. There is little evidence from the Classical period. Most remarkable are several Hellenistic sarcophagi that, albeit looted, were documented by an excavation team from 1978 to 1979. The 1977 survey located a large number of rock-cut tombs around the

¹¹⁷ Özdoğan 1977, 100 sv. T 52/18.

¹¹⁸ Özdoğan 1977, 89–90 sv. S 52/13.

¹¹⁹ Özdoğan 1977, 109 sv. T 51/15.

¹²⁰ Özdoğan 1977, 98–99 sv. T 52/17.

¹²¹ Özdoğan 1977, 111 sv. T 52/7.

¹²² Özdoğan 1977, 107–108 sv. T 51/2.

¹²³ Özdoğan 1977, 93 sv. S 52/10; Crow/French 1979.

village of Horis, which are probably from the Roman period, as well as several other Roman structures that have been preserved.¹²⁴ At **Sofiyan** a number of rock-cut tombs were found on a rocky ridge near the Euphrates bank, a few kilometres south of Horis, which suggest the existence of an ancient settlement somewhere on the plateau.¹²⁵

2.3.3.2 From the Cendere/Kahta Çay (ancient Chabinas) to the Karasu

Samosata (Samsat) was the most important place in this area and has already been discussed (2.3.2). Remains of the Samosata water supply were found around the small village of **Hardiyan**, 13 kilometres north-east. Also around the village of **Kosan** many remains of the aqueduct leading to Samsat have been preserved. Aqueducts and tunnels cut out from the rock have equally been preserved at **Zinar Mevkii**, **Harabe Deresi** and **Gelli Deresi**. Many rock-cut tombs were found at Zinar Mevkii as well.¹²⁶ The large arches for the aqueduct were usually constructed from dressed blocks of stone. In a later building phase the arches were sometimes partially or wholly blocked, perhaps to elevate the aqueduct.¹²⁷ Özdoğan and his team discovered a rock-cut tomb on a slope a kilometre north of Samosata at **Kaya Mezarlari**. A spacious central area with a vaulted roof was reached by going through a short dromos. Bricks were used in its construction.¹²⁸ A *dexiosis* relief with inscription, showing the king and Artagnes-Herakles, was discovered in **Selik**, about 10 kilometres north of Samosata. (Fig. 2.37) The stele, which had been used as an olive press, is thought to originate from Samosata.¹²⁹ It is also possible that there was a *temenos* at Selik.¹³⁰ After Samosata, **Gritille**, a large mound on the edge of the Euphrates, was the most important tell in the area. Surface finds by Özdoğan and his team demonstrated that the site was occupied continuously from the Chalcolithic period to the Classical era and medieval times.

¹²⁴ Dörner/Naumann 1939, 92–94 (sv. Kores, with earlier literature and a plan); Özdoğan 1977, 95–96 sv. S 52/15 and /19; Ögün 1987, 149–152.

¹²⁵ Özdoğan 1977, 97–98 sv. T 52/8.

¹²⁶ Dörner/Naumann 1939; Özdoğan 1977, 118–119 sv. T 51/36, T 51/37, T 51/53.

¹²⁷ Özdoğan 1977, 112–114 sv. T 51/17, T 51/53, T 51/26, T 51/27, T 51/28, T 51/29, T 51/30 and T 51/32. A row of small arches spanning the Gevrik river, which formed part of the Samosata aqueduct, have been preserved at Pra Mevkii, north-west of Biriman (Dörner/Naumann 1939, 111; Özdoğan 1977, 123 sv. T 51/11).

¹²⁸ Özdoğan 1977, 135 sv. T 51/38.

¹²⁹ Humann/Puchstein 1890, 368; Fraser 1952, 96–101; Waldmann 1973, 34–35.

¹³⁰ Personal communication, Michael Blömer.

Explorations by R. Ellis in 1981 provided evidence of the existence of pre-Hellenistic and Hellenistic phases, and excavations between 1982 and 1984 documented the remains of the medieval occupation phase.¹³¹

Ancoz (Eskitaş) is situated circa 35 kilometres north of Samosata, in a valley on the plateau between the Kahta Çay and the Euphrates.¹³² Part of a *dexiosis* relief with Antiochos I and an inscription have been found at the site; this suggests that there was an Antiochan *temenos* at Ancoz. A dedicatory hieroglyphic inscription from the Hittite/Kummuh period was discovered in the same village. The slab, found by Dörner and Goell and published by Hawkins, was built into the wall of a house but originated from a hill nearby. It is part of a group of similar inscriptions from the ninth century BC, of which the so-called Boybeypinar blocks (see *infra*) are the best-preserved and most remarkable example. As Hawkins remarked, “the localities of Boybeypinar and Ancoz are not dissimilar, and the context in which both inscriptions were discovered suggests a hilltop shrine or sanctuary, rather than a town or city, dedicated in both cases to Kupapa.” It is tempting to see religious continuity from the hilltop sanctuary that may have existed in the Hittite/Kummuh period to the Commagenean *temenos*; but this cannot be proven. In the 1977 survey the remains of an ancient building were found on a ridge overlooking the village (Han Mevkii). It is a large building, orientated east-west and measuring approximately 40 × 25 metres. Decorative architrave fragments were lined up along the road and used as *spolia* in some houses of the village. On the same ridge, the survey team detected stone reliefs and hieroglyphic inscriptions apparently exposed by ploughing; the largest fragment, showing a standing figure with sceptre and part of an inscription, was brought to Adıyaman. A large number of rock-cut tombs from the Roman period have been preserved in a valley south-east of the village.

About 35 kilometres downstream from Samosata, ancient **Tharse** (Turus) was located. Here, Dörner and Naumann found the wall of a Roman building that was still standing. Recent excavations in ancient Tharse by the Adıyaman Museum have brought to light a necropolis with rock-cut chamber tombs – many with decorative moulding around the entrance – dating from the Roman period.¹³³ Near Turus, on the east bank

¹³¹ Dörner/Naumann 1939; Özdoğan 1977, 121–122 sv. T 51/9; Redford 1986.

¹³² Dörner/Goell 1963, 30; Serdaroğlu 1977, 63, 71–72, 76; Alp 1987; Dörner/Goell 1969/70, 287; Hawkins 1970, 97–100; Özdoğan 1977, 100–102 sv. T 52/11–14; Waldmann 1973, 43; Wagner 1983, 202 n. 74; Wagner/Petzl 2003; Blömer/Winter, 117–121; Brijder, 144–145; and Blömer 2012, 105–109 (with new evidence).

¹³³ Dörner/Naumann 1939, 109–110; Erarslan 2001; Comfort/Ergeç 2001, 42.

of the Göksu river, a late Roman tower was found and documented by the Adıyaman survey. The square structure (15 × 15 m) has an entrance across its full width, opening onto three narrow rooms. Blaylock, French and Summers cautiously suggest that it may have been a monumental Roman tomb. In the village of **Sayören**, on the opposite bank of the river, remains have been preserved of a structure that might have been similar.¹³⁴ Also near Turus, but in a complex at the Euphrates, an inscription was found carved in a rock at **Damlıca**.¹³⁵ It mentions the architect Ariaramnes, a functionary of Mithridates II. From the text it can be deduced that Antiochos I ordered the building of a *temenos* in Damlıca, but apparently his successor, Mithridates II, did not have the inclination or means to complete the work. Ariaramnes left the building as it stood, but erected a statue for Zeus Soter at the same location.¹³⁶ The Euphrates road, connecting Zeugma, Samosata and Arsameia ad Euphratem, crossed the river Singas near Tharse. The remains of the stone **Singas bridge** are still in situ. Originally the two riverbanks were connected by an impressive vaulted structure that stretched over 31 metres. The bridge was part of a building programme initiated by Septimius Severus, in which also the Cendere-bridge was rebuilt, in order to provide better conditions for military operations against the Parthians.¹³⁷

Moving inland and beginning at the north side of this area, **Perre** was the most important place, at least in the Roman period. In nearby **Adıyaman** the lower part of an inscribed Antiochan relief was found.¹³⁸ Also from Adıyaman are some remains from Hittite Kummuh, including two stelai depicting the storm god Tarmis standing on a bull. Illegal excavations in the surroundings of the village of **Miroğlu**, south-east of Adıyaman, have brought to light many ancient remains, including bowls and mosaics. It is possible that there was a Roman settlement on the spot.¹³⁹ Moving south, **Kılafık Höyük** is a settlement located on the east bank of the river Singas where, in 1931, an honorary inscription to Antiochos I was discovered. The original findspot is unknown.¹⁴⁰ The stele, of which only the upper part had been preserved, shows Antiochos I in relief and contains

¹³⁴ Blaylock/French/Summers 1990, 122–125. ¹³⁵ Blömer/Winter, 150–155.

¹³⁶ Şahin 1991a, 101–105; Facella 2006, 307–309; Blömer 2012, 109–114; and Brijder, 147–148. The importance of this remarkable source will be commented upon further below.

¹³⁷ Dörner/Naumann 1939, 61–66; Wagner 1987, 28–29; Blömer/Winter, 163–167.

¹³⁸ Iacopi 1936, 23–24; Hawkins 1970, 100–108; Waldmann 1973, 5; Crowther/Facella 2003, 74–76. Iacopi mentions as findspot a further unknown site on the Euphrates near Göksu.

¹³⁹ Özdoğan 1977, 153 sv. T 50/27.

¹⁴⁰ Dörner/Naumann 1939, 43–47; Waldmann 1973, 49; Brijder, 148–149.

a dedication from someone named Apollas, son of Apollas, to the king. Dörner argued that this was “an isolated monument placed at a very specific location; Apollas, who erected the stele in honour of Antiochos I, was obliged to the King since he had been granted certain privileges.”¹⁴¹ West of Kilafik lies the village of **Sofraz Köy**.¹⁴² The *dexiosis* relief from Sofraz Köy, discovered in 1974 and published by Wagner and Petzl, shows Antiochos I and Apollo.¹⁴³ (Fig. 3.9) The inscription reveals that it belonged to a sanctuary dedicated to Apollo Epekoos (“the prayer-listening”) and Artemis Diktyinna. The relief has generated much debate, because Apollo Epekoos is not found in any other of the Antiochan sites and, moreover, is often regarded as a “purely Greek” manifestation in contrast to the “syncretised” Apollo-Mithras-Helios-Hermes.¹⁴⁴ Part of another Antiochan relief, found by Wagner in 1971, indicates that there may have been a small dynastical sanctuary at **Çaputlu Ağaç**: the preserved eight lines of text are part of the text of the great cult inscription. The upper part of a relief showing a Herakles *dexiosis* was found nearby.¹⁴⁵ At a site called **Boybeypinar**, also nearby, another *dexiosis* had been found two years before. The relief shows Antiochos I and Herakles. It may have belonged to the same *temenos*. The largest and best-preserved inscription from Hittite Kummuh was found at the site of Boybeypinar as well, in 1931.¹⁴⁶ It consists of four unequal-sized blocks of grey basalt that were originally inscribed on all sides with hieroglyphic text. Finds from Ancoz and Adıyaman are closely related (see above). Hawkins concluded that the blocks made up a podium on which the dedications named in the text, mainly pieces of furniture, were placed. This inscription provides little information on Hittite Commagene “except in so far as the ... inscriptions testify to an enthusiastic devotional life and a tendency to build shrines on apparently out-of-the-way hilltops,” according to Hawkins (108).

¹⁴¹ Dörner in Dörner/Naumann 1939, 47: “Ein gewiss an besonderer Stelle aufgestelltes, alleinstehendes Bildnis, das Apollas zu Ehren seines Königs Antiochos I errichtet hat, weil er sich ihm wegen der Erteilung besonderer Vorrechte verpflichtet fühlte.”

¹⁴² Blömer/Winter, 168–172.

¹⁴³ Wagner/Petzl 1976; Clarysse 1976, 264; Wagner 1983, 199; Wagner 2000, 16–17; Crowther/Facella 2003, 71–74; Brijder, 141–144.

¹⁴⁴ Note, however, that Apollo is depicted with a radiate corona as Apollo Helios. For this discussion, see 3.7, where the relief and its scholarly understanding are discussed more extensively in the section “bricolage as historical evidence.”

¹⁴⁵ Crowther/Facella 2003, 76–77.

¹⁴⁶ Dörner/Goell 1969/70, 287; Hawkins 1970, 72–97 and 108–110; Waldmann 1973, 45; Wagner 1983, 214; Blömer/Winter, 188; Brijder, 92–94.

2.3.3.3 From the Karasu to Zeugma

The Euphrates road crossed the river Karasu at **Habeş**. A Hittite relief from the second half of the tenth century BC was found near this location. Remains from the Roman period were also found, including part of the original pillar of the bridge, constructed by the *Legio IV Scythica*, and inscriptions.¹⁴⁷ About 20 kilometres south of the Karasu crossover at Habeş lies **Ayni**. This location was apparently used as a Euphrates crossing in ancient times; however, no remains from the Hellenistic or Roman period have been preserved in the present-day village of Gözeli. On a cliff at a dry gorge nearby, called **Kenk**, an Assyrian relief and inscription dating to the ninth century BC have been cut from the rock. The statue of a reclining river god, and an inscription from the period of Vespasian, have also been preserved.¹⁴⁸ The Euphrates road crossed the Marsyas near **Rumkale** (known as Hromgla in the Middle Ages), and at the same point the Marsyas flows into the Euphrates. The remains of a fortress can be seen at the most strategic spot: a high and steep rock above the intersection of both rivers. The area was an important centre in the eleventh century, when the Crusaders ruled Urfa, and also during the following centuries: in medieval times the site contained an important monastery as well as a monumental citadel. It is likely that the site was also occupied during earlier centuries; although as yet no earlier remains have been found. The road from Doliche crossed the river some 20 kilometres to the east.¹⁴⁹ About ten kilometres south of Rumkale, **Aroulis** (Ehneş) was located; a name that is mentioned on the Peutinger map. Although its identification is contested, present-day Ehneş seems the most logical candidate. A bridge from the Roman period has been preserved at the city, and there was probably also a Roman army camp.¹⁵⁰ **Çifteköz**, on the cliffs at the Euphrates, has large numbers of preserved ancient tombs, as well as cisterns and a large underground room that was used as a mill, as is made evident by the many potsherds found there.¹⁵¹ **Horum Höyük** is a mound about 20 kilometres north of Zeugma. It is 35 metres high, but has now been totally submerged in water. Rescue excavations carried out by a team from the French Archaeological Institute at Istanbul traced its occupation history back to the late Chalcolithic period. No clear remains were found

¹⁴⁷ Comfort/Abadie-Reynal/Ergeç 2000, 117; Comfort/Ergeç 2001, 31.

¹⁴⁸ Comfort/Abadie-Reynal/Ergeç 2000, 115–117; Blömer/Winter, 203–208.

¹⁴⁹ Comfort/Abadie-Reynal/Ergeç 2000, 113–115; Blömer/Winter, 208–217.

¹⁵⁰ Wagner 1976, fig. 1; Comfort/Ergeç 2001, 33. Cumont (Cumont 1917, 151–166) documented Roman quarries at the spot.

¹⁵¹ Comfort/Abadie-Reynal/Ergeç 2000, 121.

from the Commagenean period; other artefacts date to the late Roman period. There are indications that in antiquity the site, located directly on the waterfront, functioned as an open harbour for river transport. The mound at Horum has been identified with the site of Antioch-on-the-Euphrates, and with the site of Ourima of the Peutinger map.¹⁵² At **Kaleboyu**, the French scholars Comfort, Abadie-Reynal and Ergeç have documented “a hitherto undiscovered castle, probably of Hellenistic origin.” In their 2001 publication some more information is added, but they also remark that in fact “little was found to date the site.”¹⁵³

In **Elif**, **Hasanoğlu** and **Hisar**, on the road from Doliche to Samosata, Roman tombs have been preserved. The remains of abandoned sites with houses probably dating back to the Roman period are also documented in Elif.¹⁵⁴ At **Kösk**, remains of a temple precinct, probably dating to the Roman period, have been well preserved on a mountain ridge approximately 10 kilometres south-west of Elif.¹⁵⁵ At **Gümrükküyu**, a site near the Doliche-Samosata road: “some carved and decorated blocks on a mound adjacent to a well and an abandoned settlement with tombs, cisterns and quarries, near the course of the Roman road, seem also probably to have been the site of an ancient temple.”¹⁵⁶ The most important centres in this southern part of Commagene – **Dolice** and **Zeugma** – have been discussed above (2.3.2).

2.3.4 The Great Cult Inscription

Initially it might seem odd to discuss an inscription as part of an overview of Commagene and its archaeology but in fact it is not. The overview of the relevant archaeological remains from dynastic monuments, cities and villages presented above has shown that parts of the great cult inscription (or *nomos*) are to be found in many contexts throughout Commagene. This is remarkable. By far most people in the region will have spoken (some form of) Aramaic – but could not read. From the late Hellenistic period no inscriptions in Aramaic have been preserved. As we have seen there are inscriptions in Greek, but these inscriptions almost all belong to a single

¹⁵² Marro/Tibet/Ergeç 1997, 1998, 1999, and 2000; Cohen 2006, 151–152 sv. Antioch on the Euphrates.

¹⁵³ Comfort/Abadie-Reynal/Ergeç 2000, 117; Comfort/Ergeç 2001, 27.

¹⁵⁴ Wagner 1985; Comfort/Abadie-Reynal/Ergeç 2000, 113; Blömer/Winter, 218–225, for an overview of all remains, with fine illustrations and earlier bibliography. In general now Ergeç 2003.

¹⁵⁵ Comfort/Abadie-Reynal/Ergeç 2000, 117 (with fig. 17).

¹⁵⁶ Comfort/Abadie-Reynal/Ergeç 2000, 117; Comfort/Ergeç 2001, 37.

text that, apparently, was distributed over the kingdom in many copies. This text is indicated as “the great cult inscription” and often called *nomos*. *Nomos* means “law” in Greek, and in Commagene studies the designation refers to the great cult inscription Antiochos I had set up at Nemrud Dağ. The text was inscribed on the back of the throne-bases of the statues, on both the East Terrace and the West Terrace. The text itself is similar on both terraces. The calligraphic style is more monumental on the East Terrace; the West Terrace version, however, has been preserved more completely. In fact, both copies complement each other rather well. The inscription provides all kinds of decrees with regard to the functioning of the sanctuary (hence the designation “law”), besides information on the intentions of Antiochos I. Strictly spoken, therefore, the *nomos* prescriptions are part of a larger text called the great cult inscription. In secondary literature this distinction is not always made. Also, the terms can often be seen applied somewhat more loosely to refer to *all* texts that were part of this standardised Antiochan literary/epigraphic repertoire – also when the text, strictly speaking, was not part of the cult inscription on Nemrud Dağ.¹⁵⁷

The great cult inscription is a remarkable text that, perhaps, has not yet had the interpretative attention it deserves.¹⁵⁸ The [Appendix](#) of this book presents Dörner’s translation of the text. Eduard Norden, who characterised it as a “dithyramb in prose,” struggled to validate its artificial style; and he was not the only one.¹⁵⁹ But what does it say? It starts with a short section (part I: 1–35) explaining the significance and purpose of the inscription “recorded for all time, on consecrated pedestals with inviolable letters” (lines 1–10), adding that piety would be the most secure possession for mankind, as it has been for the king himself (11–23). Then “the great king Antiochos, the God, the Righteous One etc. etc.” explains how he envisions his kingdom to be “the common dwelling place of all the gods” and adds on those gods that

¹⁵⁷ The text was found and published by Humann and Puchstein (*Humann/Puchstein 1890*, 262–278). For a recent recapitulation of this and subsequent finds, see *SEG 39 sv. 1284–1285*; *Crowther/Facella 2003* and *Facella 2006*. This work has now replaced *Dörrie 1964*. A new corpus of all royal inscriptions from Commagene is forthcoming. Here and elsewhere in the book the *nomos* is quoted from the edition by Dörner published (with English translation) in *Goell/Sanders*. This English translation can be found in the [Appendix](#).

¹⁵⁸ The only monographic treatments (*Waldis 1920*; *Krüger 1937*) predate WWII. Note the interesting subtitle (*ein beitrag zur Koine-Forschung*) of *Waldis 1920*. 3.3 will suggest some avenues for inquiry by suggesting that what we have here is very comparable to (and pre-dating) the *Res Gestae* by Augustus.

¹⁵⁹ *Norden 1898*, 140–146, 145: “Dithyrambus in Prosa.” See further [4.1](#).

“by means of every kind of art I decorated the representations of their form, as the ancient lore of Persians and Greeks – the fortunate roots of my ancestry – had handed them down” (24–35); before starting to describe the *hierotheresion* and his intentions with it. That extensive description (part II: 36–123) tells us that the *hierotheresion* is not only a tomb for the king himself (“indestructible by the ravages of time, in closest proximity to the heavenly throne”) but also a place for the pious veneration of the gods and the deified royal ancestors (36–52). Subsequently (53–66) the statues of the various gods are identified: “Therefore, as you see, I have set up these divine images of Zeus-Oromasdes and of Apollo-Helios-Mithras-Hermes and of Artagnes-Herakles-Ares and also of my all-nourishing homeland Commagene”; and is explained that “from one and the same quarry” also the king himself is placed amongst these gods. The inscription then continues with a discussion of the cult and its revenues (67–104). “Chosen priests arrayed in such vestments as are proper to the race of the Persians” are mentioned, as well as “new festivals in honor of the gods and in my honor” to be celebrated on the king’s birthday and on the day marking his accession to the throne. The population of his empire is summoned to join these festivities and can come “to the nearest sanctuaries, whichever is most conveniently located for the festival observance.” After the establishment of these regulations the *nomos* is proclaimed (105–123), “ordered to be inscribed upon sacred, inviolable stelae” and “binding upon all generations of mankind.” This holy law is then spelled out (part III: 124–190) and starts with the necessity for a priest who should watch the memorial “and devote himself to the care and the proper adornment of the sacred images” (124–131). Next the festivals are discussed in a rather practical manner (the duties of the priest; the guests to be invited; etc.: 132–160). The priest should be “decently garbed in Persian raiment” and “splendid sacrifices” are called for. “Both the native and the foreigner” should come together. Interestingly, the king also mentions drinking cups, dedicated by himself, that may be used by his guests “as long as they remain in the holy place and participate in the general assembly for the feast.” A [final section](#) of the *nomos* deals with the musicians in the *hierotheresion*. These people matter greatly and they and their descendants should be taken care of very well (“No one, no king or ruler, no priest or official shall ever make slaves of these hierodules”). The final part of the great cult inscription (part IV: 190–237) provides provisions for the continuation of the cult. Its first section (191–211) promises severe punishment for those violating the regulations just stipulated. The second section (212–231) sets the *hierotheresion* as an example for future generations. The third and last

section (232–237) promises divine providence for those who obey the *nomos*: “For those who do so I pray that all the ancestral gods, from Persia and Macedonia and from the native hearth of Commagene, may continue to be gracious to them in all clemency.”

One out of many more remarkable features of this inscription is that it literally comments on the statues, the context and the dynastic programme it is part of. Most scholars, therefore, take the information provided by this text as a point of departure in their understanding of Antiochan Commagene. Although this is certainly not illogical, I think it is much more problematical than often realised, as will be discussed in detail in the [next section](#).

2.4 Evaluating the (Archaeological) Sources

This brief presentation and description of archaeological sources from the late Hellenistic and Roman periods in an Anatolian and Syrian-Levantine region will present a familiar picture to someone acquainted with the archaeology of this landscape and period.

There is a greater representation of monumental contexts than the more mundane social contexts: there are royal tombs and sanctuaries (Nemrud Dağ, Arsameia ad Nymphaeum, Arsameia ad Euphratem, Karakuş) but there are no public buildings or houses. There is a greater representation of cities (Samosata, Tille) than of the countryside. There is the relatively strong epigraphical record, and there are Roman tombs and Roman monumental infrastructure. It is striking that sources from the (later) Roman imperial period dominate the archaeological record in a quantitative sense, and that the Roman army figures prominently.

However, a closer look – focusing on the late Hellenistic period – reveals that the Commagenean archaeological record has a very distinct characteristic. The main conclusion from this overview is that the Commagenean archaeological record presents an extremely one-sided picture: it is largely Antiochan. All monumental contexts date to the reign of Antiochos, and mainly reflect his *Bildprogramm*, as does the epigraphical record for the late Hellenistic period.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, there are very few archaeological sources that can help to contextualise this dynastic image. There is almost no

¹⁶⁰ Karakuş is post-Antiochan and therefore falls outside this group; however, in its conception and execution it is clearly derivative of the Antiochan project and therefore included with the analysis that follows.

information on daily life in Commagenean villages or cities from the first century BC, and there is not even a stratigraphy published for the period.¹⁶¹ As the surveys in the area must mainly be characterised as rescue archaeology, their results are unfortunately too general to provide this angle. Although the *temene* and *hierotheresia* reveal royal imagery, they provide very little context: we see a design, a programme, but we seldom see cult locations in use.¹⁶² In addition, we have no archaeological sources from the centuries before the Antiochan era, and the sources from the late first century BC are derivative of the dynastic image designed by Antiochos I. The remains from the Roman period generally date from too long after the Antiochan period to be relevant to the present investigation. They testify to a remarkably swift and seemingly uniform incorporation into the “Roman” system; but that subject is outside the scope of this study.

We must therefore conclude that the sources available to the study of late Hellenistic Commagene are qualitatively limited. It would seem that it is possible to write a politico-dynastic history, but that there is insufficient information to write a social, economic, religious or cultural one.¹⁶³ Even focusing on this particular aspect, sources outside the Antiochan context are not abundant, as almost all the information we have on, for instance, the predecessors of Antiochos I are not contemporary but from the period of Antiochos I.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ As is underlined by the recent overviews provided in *Blömer 2012* and *Facella 2012*. For that reason, amongst others, the Tille excavation report on the Hellenistic and Roman periods is eagerly awaited. It is also disturbing that there has not yet been a proper publication of the Samosata excavations; although we should be grateful for the recent booklet *Samosata. I. Theos Antiokhos Sarayi* (Ankara 2013) published by Orhan Bingöl, one of the excavators of the time. In the mid-1970s an application to undertake archaeological (rescue) work at Samosata by the Netherlands Institute in Turkey (NIT, Istanbul) unfortunately was not granted (F. Gerritsen, current director of the NIT, personal comment).

¹⁶² The Damlica inscription seems to be a modest exception as it mentions an architect called Ariaramnes. The recent Doliche explorations are important in this respect, since they can potentially provide us with a sanctuary in use during the Antiochan period and, in addition, a *longue-durée* perspective for the cult location; cf. *Blömer 2012*, 116 ff.

¹⁶³ Fowler (*Fowler 2005*, 128) correctly states that: “Antiochos’ public image exists in a void; it elicits no commentary, no interpretations, nor even any interesting misunderstandings.”

¹⁶⁴ Hoepfner (*Hoepfner 1983*, 61) concluded on the Arsameia excavations: “Nach der hier vorgelegten Untersuchung wird deutlich, daß der landesweit organisierte Herrscherkult vornehmlich das Werk von Antiochos I ist, mithin fast alle Bauten und Baulichkeiten der Temene und Hierotheresia in seiner Regierungszeit zwischen ca. 69 und 35 v. Chr. entstanden sind” (“Based on the results of this research it can be concluded that the dynastic cult that was established across the entire country was the work of Antiochos I; almost all buildings and the monuments forming *temene* and *hierotheresia* have been constructed during the period of his rule between 69 and 35 BC”). The conclusions of the Arsameia excavations are in fact quite radical, but they have not been taken up by subsequent scholarship: see 3.7.

Although scholars have noted this state of affairs, it has seldom given rise to epistemological doubts: on the contrary, scholars in general express confidence in the sources. The prevailing judgement on the sources that are available may be illustrated by two quotes. In his *Hellenistic royal portraits* Smith wrote:

From Kommagene under Antiochos I (c. 69–38 BC), we have a large amount of surviving monumental royal sculptures, unique in being in context, documented by inscriptions, externally dated, and precisely identified, and unique also in quantity. We could wish to have this sort of evidence for almost any other time and place in the Hellenistic world, rather than Kommagene.¹⁶⁵

In the same vein Schwertheim recently argued:

None of the Hellenistic Kingdoms illustrates the role of Asia Minor as a bridging country, and as an intermediary between Orient and Occident, better than Commagene on the Euphrates. This is mostly due to the exceptional source material. There are but a few historiographical sources related to the Kingdom; in contrast, the rulers left an enormous legacy of self-referencing written sources, unparalleled by any other kingdom in Asia Minor. The archaeological monuments complement the written sources in a unique way.¹⁶⁶

The present study argues the contrary viewpoint. The following chapters aim to make clear that, in a manner of speaking, we only see what Antiochos I wanted to convey – and that we lack sources from Commagene itself to check, contextualise or provide a better understanding of this image.¹⁶⁷ In a qualitative respect, the available sources are actually meagre because they are so extremely one-sided. It could be argued, therefore, that the king not only dominated the first-century BC

¹⁶⁵ Smith 1988a, 102–103. In this quotation again there is an (implicit) negative characterisation of Antiochos I as an unrepresentative lunatic: one might ask why one would wish to have this sort of evidence for almost any other time and place in the Hellenistic world *but* Commagene; see Chapter 1. Note however that Smith is very well aware of the fact that this ensemble of source material constitutes a dynastic *mise en scène*; as I myself, following Smith, will argue extensively in Chapter 3 as well.

¹⁶⁶ Schwertheim 2005, 77: “Keine der hellenistischen Königreiche verdeutlicht so gut die Rolle Kleinasien als Brückenland und als Vermittlerin zwischen Orient und Okzident wie das am Euphrat gelegene Kommagene. Das liegt nicht zuletzt an der ausnehmend guten Quellsituation. Wir besitzen zwar wenige historiographische Quellen für dieses Königreich, dafür aber verfügen wir über schriftliche Selbstzeugnisse seiner Herrscher, wie sie für kein anderes der Königreiche Kleinasien vorhanden sind. Die archäologischen Denkmäler ergänzen die Schriftzeugnisse in einzigartiger Weise.” See also Schwertheim 2000.

¹⁶⁷ The rock-cut relief from Haydaran, recently published by Blömer (Blömer 2011), might be one of the few exceptions: if it is really to be dated to the second half of the first century BC it might indeed testify to the iconographical influence of the Antiochan visual imagery beyond the royal project itself.

landscape, but also dominates its archaeological inquiry to date: so far Commagenean archaeology does little to look beyond the Antiochan project.¹⁶⁸ The consequences of scholarly research taking the information provided by Antiochos I on Commagene under his rule at face value will be discussed in the [following chapter](#).

¹⁶⁸ As most recently illustrated in *Brijder*. For a similar conclusion with regard to the study of the Attalids from Pergamon, see Kosmetatou (*Kosmetatou* 2003, 174), who phrases it as “their propaganda still works.”

The overview in [Chapter 2](#) has provided a general impression of Antiochan material culture. Antiochos I built dynastic cult locations on mountaintops across his kingdom, decorated with recurring elements such as colossal statues, a foundation text (the great cult inscription with the *nomos*) and *dexiosis* reliefs in a standardised style. He named the sites that included royal tombs *hierotheresia* (Nemrud Dağ, Arsameia ad Nymphaeum and Arsameia ad Euphratem), and described the others as *temene*. Monumental tombs from his dynastic successors (mausoleia) follow in this tradition.¹ It seems appropriate to describe this as a royal dynastic project, a form of *Kulturpolitik* whereby Antiochos I apparently used a unified set of symbols to communicate certain messages through material culture.²

What were the reasons behind this royal project? Dynastic display – *Selbstdarstellung* – certainly played a major role. Grand, public building projects are a form of self-presentation, and a grand dynastic project of this kind, with recurring elements displayed across the country, can be aptly described as propaganda.³ However, this conclusion alone does not help us to further develop interpretations, because issues of power are implicit in elite architecture by definition.⁴ It is perhaps more illuminating, therefore, to try and analyse the reasons behind this specific form of “propaganda.”⁵

¹ For an overview of the epigraphic evidence (and its relation to the archaeological monuments) see [Facella 2006](#), 367–368. In their 2003 publication on another part of the *nomos* discovered in Zeugma, Crowther and Facella discuss a large number of texts, often adding additional observations. This article and [Facella 2006](#) are the most recent publications that provide an overview. Waldmann ([Waldmann 1973](#)) also provided such an overview; however, his conclusions have in general been critically reviewed. See also [Waldmann 1991](#), which is reviewed in [Jacobs 1992](#). A new corpus of all royal inscriptions from Commagene is forthcoming.

² For the concept of culture-politics or *Kulturpolitik* (and its function in Hellenistic Sicily under Agathokles and Hieron II), see [Lehmler 2005](#).

³ As, for instance, does [Sullivan 1978](#).

⁴ For an introduction to the subject see [Hipp/Seidl 1996](#). For a critique on how this view tends to become a standard, overall interpretation, obscuring all other cultural meanings and associations, see [Ronnes 2006](#).

⁵ This chapter aims to use the contested notion of “propaganda” with care; exemplary in this respect is [Marin/Veyne 2011](#). Critical introductions and case studies can also be found in [Weber/Zimmermann 2003](#); [Hekster/Fowler 2005](#); and [Meister 2012](#) (with an overview of the bibliography on pp. 192–222). See also the conclusion (3.2) below.

In view of the historical background we may hypothesise, as other scholars have, that Antiochos I's new political importance after 64 BC required an ideological underpinning, and that his *Bildprogramm* was designed to achieve this.⁶ Kropp characterises this as “*Legitimationsdruck*” (the pressure of legitimisation).⁷ One of the notable characteristics of his legitimising display was its deliberate suggestion of “inbetweenness.” There is the recurring construction of a dual Persian/Iranian and Greek identity, while at the same time the king concurrently names himself *philhellen* and *philorhomaïos* in his great cult inscription. This chapter will explore why Antiochos I constructed this specific identity for himself and his dynasty, and how common such a strategy was in the late Hellenistic period. The broader social context plays an important role in this analysis. Jacobs’ 2003 article is one of the few that explicitly focuses on what Antiochos I tries to achieve in terms of identity. He analyses the meaning of the Antiochan *Bildprogramm* through the relationship between social context and dynastic display, and concludes that the king would have attempted to create a new cultural identity to go with the new political situation he was in. The combination of Persian/Iranian and Greek elements would refer to the two most important groups of inhabitants in the kingdom whose cultural identity Antiochos I tried to accommodate.⁸ Although in a much more nuanced way, Jacobs’ point of view illustrates the common opinion that Commagene’s geographical location between East and West, and the combination of Eastern and Western people in society, resulted in the dual East-West identity of the Antiochan project.⁹

⁶ Cf. Jacobs 2003, 117: “An Erklärungen der Intentionen des Antiochos hat es nicht gefehlt . . . Das meist gebrauchte Schlagwort in diesem Zusammenhang heißt Legitimation” (“There have been many attempts to explain the intentions of Antiochos . . . The most frequently used keyword in this context is legitimacy”).

⁷ Kropp 2013, 35.

⁸ “Deren kulturellem Identitätsverständnis versuchte Antiochos offenbar mit einiger Sensibilität entgegenzukommen” (“It seems that Antiochos tried to meet their understanding of their cultural identity with a certain amount of sensitivity”), Jacobs 2003, 120–121. Cf. also p. 117 where he talks about “latent vorhandene ethnische Probleme” (“latent ethnic problems”) that Antiochos I would have tried to solve. Note Jacobs 2002b, 35 which characterises the Antiochan project as an attempt at “Balance” while adding: “Dies alles findet seine einleuchtendste Erklärung darin, daß die genannten Rücksichtnahmen auf die Besucher des Heiligtums zielten, die vermutlich in zwei besonders repräsentativen Gruppen, der alteingesessenen iranischen Oberschicht und den Nachkommen der makedonischen Eroberer, angesprochen werden sollten” (“The most plausible explanation to all of this seems that the above considerations aimed at the visitors of the sanctuary, who should probably be addressed as the two most representative groups: the well-established Iranian elite and the descendants of the Macedonian conquerors”).

⁹ Also Schwertheim (Schwertheim 2005, 78) expressed this viewpoint when he wrote that the Antiochan *Bildprogramm* would be able to provide “Rückschlüsse auf das Identitätsbewußtsein

The present chapter will critically investigate this common opinion as well as explore different understandings. The concept of identity is thereby used as a perspective to explain change in first-century BC Commagene through the role of material culture. By means of a focus on identity, the analysis will investigate *what* Antiochan material culture does in Commagene and *why*. It will be shown that drawing concepts tied up with identity into the analysis – such as cultural identity, cultural formation, ethnogenesis, cultural memory, tradition and canon – will build a more specific understanding of interpretations such as *Herrschaftslegitimation*, and enable us to move beyond them.¹⁰ First, the different elements of the *Bildprogramm* will be analysed and contextualised within their wider Hellenistic context. The main conclusion of this section will be that the different elements Antiochos I makes use of – a *hierothesion* in the form of a tumulus, colossal statues, a type of “foundation text,” ancestor galleries, etc. – all belong to the quite standardised toolbox of Hellenistic (dynastical) practice. To understand their meaning in social interaction and behaviour, late Hellenistic Commagenean society will subsequently be explored. What can be concluded about the relation between late Hellenistic Commagene and the Antiochan programme? Due to a lack of data on Commagenean society in the mid first century BC, that question will prove to be difficult to

der Menschen dieser Region” (“an insight into the identity-perception of the people of this region”). Hoepfner (*Hoepfner* 1983, 59–60) formulated it as follows: “Die Vermutung liegt nahe, daß die Erhaltung der innenpolitischen Stabilität für Antiochos eine Existenzfrage war, die ihn auch bei seiner Konzeption eines absoluten Herrscherkultes leitete . . . so sollte in Kommagene eine neue synkretistische Religion mit einer ‘Vaterfigur’ dazu beitragen, hier auch künftig die alten Verhältnisse zu erhalten” (“It seems reasonable to assume that maintaining political stability within the country was a question of political survival for Antiochus. This concern guided him in his conception of an absolutistic ruler cult . . . in this sense the new syncretic religion, based on a ‘father-figure,’ should help in Commagene to maintain and carry the established relationships/tradition into the future”). Similar views already in *Duchesne-Guillemin* 1984.

¹⁰ A vast amount of literature has been written on identity in the last decades, spanning several disciplines, and it is not useful to discuss these debates here. I have recently provided a summary of the various understandings of identity within the archaeology of the late Hellenistic world, in which I also discussed related concepts and their definitions within the social sciences (*Versluys* 2013a), and I refer to that article for further theoretical background. For the present chapter the elaboration of identity as given in Jan Assmann’s concept of *das kulturelle Gedächtnis* has been most important (*Assmann* 1992). For archaeology and the concept of identity a recent overview is provided in the reader *Insoll* 2006. A selection of other useful and relevant recent studies includes: *Graves-Brown/Jones/Gamble* 1986; *Shennan* 1989; *Friedman* 1990, 14–39; *Parsons* 1993, 152–170; *Berry/Laurence* 1998; *Huskinson* 2000; *Malkin* 2001; *Hall* 2002; *Luraghi* 2002, 45–69; *Borg* 2004; *Lieu* 2004; *Lomas* 2004; *Conlin Casella/Fowler* 2005; *Gruen* 2005a; *Rieckhoff/Sommer* 2007; *Wilhite* 2007; *Luce* 2007, 125–140; *Revell* 2009; *Hales/Hodos* 2010. For the use of the concept of identity in Roman archaeology (and a critique) see *Pitts* 2007. Although this chapter is on identity, it certainly agrees with E. Hobsbawm that “Identity history is not enough” (*On history*, 1997, Chapter 21).

answer: the existence of a distinct Commagenean culture or tradition in that period cannot be postulated. As an alternative approach, therefore, the concept of the invention of tradition will be explored. We will see that inventing traditions is a common (dynastic) practice in the first century BC whereby material culture plays a pivotal role, and against that background it seems that Antiochos I was actively constructing history as well. To provide more background to that important yet still general observation, a subsequent section will look at what kind of traditions mattered to Antiochos I, and how he positioned himself towards the past and the present. The conclusion will use the arguments made in this chapter to critically question (aspects of) the methodology of Commagenean archaeology and the *Kommagene-Forschung* more in general.

3.1 An Analysis of the *Bildprogramm*: What Did Antiochos I Demonstrate?

To understand what Antiochos I achieved in terms of identity and the concepts related to it, and why he did so, it is necessary to first study the different elements of his *Bildprogramm*. This section will therefore describe the main elements of the material culture found on Antiochan sites, and briefly analyse and contextualise them. The following elements are discussed: (1) a hilltop sanctuary, (2) a temple-tomb (*hierothesion*) in the form of a tumulus, (3) colossal statues, (4) a canonical text (the great cult inscription and *nomos*), (5) *dexiosis* reliefs and other sculptural decorations and (6) ancestor galleries. These features are explicitly *not* discussed in great individual detail but will be analysed in a more structural way and along the three interpretative lines laid out in the introduction. Each time, therefore, we will ask ourselves: How does this element fit into the larger Hellenistic picture? Can we talk about appropriation and, if so, where is the element taken from and why is it emulated? And how was it supposed to function – what did it do – in its Commagenean context?

3.1.1 A Hilltop Sanctuary

No visitor on his way to or at Nemrud Dağ can escape the overwhelming impression of the landscape in combination with the location of the site.¹¹

¹¹ For an anthropological view on (part of) the Commagenean landscape and its inhabitants in the twentieth century, see Bates 1973.



Figure 3.1 Nemrud Dağ, a view on the Taurus and the river plain from the south, with the tumulus of Nemrud Dağ clearly visible from afar.

The monument is not placed on the highest peak of the mountain range, but on the most visible one. It dominates the anti-Taurus mountain chain (Ankar Dağları) and, moreover, is the focal point of the entire area around it. The natural peak was converted into a tumulus-form covered with gravel, and the monument was thereby clearly recognisable from afar and from all directions.¹² This effect is the strongest when one comes from the southern plain. Crossing the river Chabinas, every visitor must have been struck by the massive mountain range that rose before his eyes, and in particular by the eye-catching hilltop upon which the monument stood. (Fig. 3.1) Nemrud Dağ would have been recognisable from large parts of the Commagenean territory, especially from other elevated places in the landscape where *hierotheresia* or *temene* were located. This principle worked also – or perhaps especially – the other

¹² In the first mapping survey of the area by Helmuth von Moltke in the 1830s, the Nemrud Dağ hilltop was used extensively as a point of reference but apparently without being inspected; see Dörner 1987, 13. See also the comment by Otto Puchstein when he was shown the location of Nemrud Dağ by Karl Sester on 28 April 1882: “der für den Reisenden, der ihn einmal kennt, weder von der Ebene noch von den Bergen selbst aus mit andern zu verwechseln ist und weit und breit als Merkmal zur bequemen Orientierung benutzt werden kann” (“Once travellers have seen Nemrud Dağ, both from the plain or from the mountains, they will never mistake it for any other place; it remains a landmark which serves a convenient point of reference from far and wide”), Dörner 1987, 22.

way around.¹³ An inhabitant that looked up at a local hill where he knew there was a *temenos*, with its particular set of material culture, would immediately be reminded of the existence of other dynastic cult locations. In that way the whole of Commagene was covered by a kind of imaginary grid that consisted of landscape and material culture actively working together, and, of course, the ideas behind them. Therefore, it could be said that the landscape was changed by Antiochos I into a kind of human artefact.¹⁴

Such a view sits comfortably with the outcome of the (archaeological) debate on landscape from the last decades.¹⁵ Landscapes, it was shown, were not so much uninscribed physical concepts but human artefacts and, as such, central elements in social production and reproduction. Antiochos I was clearly interested in how political authority was constituted through the landscape.¹⁶ By using these spatial practices Antiochos I changed the map of Commagene into an Antiochan space.¹⁷ All the *hierotheresia* and *temene* were key elements in the production of Antiochos I's political authority: the rhetoric of kingship was thus not only played out in language and images but in the landscape as well.¹⁸ The Antiochan *hierotheresia* and *temene*, so it seems, were intended to make the Antiochan space visible and become sites of social memory.¹⁹

¹³ Horden and Purcell (*Horden/Purcell 2000*, 421–422) call this principle the visualisation of space; cf. 421: “The individual geographical feature and its religious veneration are thus part of a wider imagining of how whole regions actually ‘work’ within the known terrain of the world.” See also 124–132 on “lines of sound and lines of sight.”

¹⁴ See *Wilkinson 2003* for a general analysis of Near Eastern landscapes as human artefacts. Wilkinson comments on Nemrud Dağ (207): “Therefore, not only did Antiochus, in death, continue metaphorically to command his territory, but also the web of formal and informal ways provided a continuing link between the sanctified tomb sanctuary and the surrounding landscape.”

¹⁵ Important references include: *Alcock 1993a*; *Tilley 1994*; *Knapp/Ashmore 1999* and 2002. For a recent case study in this vein in the vicinity of Commagene see *Steinsapir 2005*.

¹⁶ As were the Seleucids before him; cf. *Ma (Ma 2003a*, 149) who discusses the “repeated epigraphical narrative of Seleukid administration” and concludes: “The rhetoric of Empire played its part in constructing a Seleucid space, within which individuals and communities were aware of the state.”

¹⁷ Or, what has been called, “a cartography of political authority.” For this definition, a theoretical introduction to the concept of the political landscape and examples, see *Smith 2003*. For “Monarchs in a landscape” with regard to Behistun and the Persians, see *Fowler 2005*, 134–141.

¹⁸ The relationship between polities and the wider social context of the landscape is called *geopolitics* in *Smith 2003*, 112–148 (with a Maya case study).

¹⁹ There already were quite some other political landscapes in the region, prior to that of Antiochos I. *Harmansah (Harmansah 2007)* has noted that: “The Upper Mesopotamian and Anatolian states of the late bronze and Early Iron Ages had a special interest in shaping their environments and socializing their imperial landscapes through large-scale programs of building operations . . . The practice of carving rock reliefs that structured imperial landscapes seems to have been a part

In antiquity hilltop sanctuaries could be found all over the Mediterranean and Near East.²⁰ Nemrud Dağ fits their general principle of splendid isolation: the rock-cut tumulus with colossal stone statues would have evoked power and majesty. Not without reason, Antiochos I highlighted its security and remoteness – and hence divinity – in the great cult inscription, through the description “in closest proximity to the heavenly throne.”²¹ A hilltop location therefore signals something extraordinary; especially in the Hellenistic period when stressing the visibility of conspicuous architecture was a general trend.²²

Little can be said on the functioning of Nemrud Dağ or other Antiochan (hilltop) sanctuaries; the *hierothesion* itself was probably never in use, and for other cult locations we lack data on their functioning as well.²³ The great cult inscription, however, does inform us of their intended use. Nemrud Dağ was supposed to be self-supportive and to be regularly visited on special occasions: the birthday of Antiochos I and his father should be celebrated monthly throughout the year, and at those occasions the priest should dress himself in Persian garment. Antiochos I allotted plots of land to the *temene* and *hierotheresia* to ensure their income – a well-known principle in the ancient world.²⁴ In the same vein, it is likely that the celebrations of the king’s birthday were designed to function like the many religious festivals of the ancient world.²⁵ In view of what has been

of a cross-culturally shared rhetoric among Near Eastern polities of the Iron Age.” See now also *Harmansah 2013*. In combining royal rhetoric, memory practices and the making of spatial narratives, Antiochos I thus followed a tradition that was familiar to the region.

²⁰ See *Horde/Purcell 2000*, 413: “Mountain religion is as easy to exemplify from every period of Mediterranean history as water religion.” For background see *Horde/Purcell 2000*, 413–414 (“The otherness of the mountain, its security and remoteness, as well as the numinous quality of certain landforms, played a large part in the choice of such places; there are numerous evocations of the power and majesty of natural rock in religious architecture”) and 421–422, as well as *Briault 2007*, 122–141.

²¹ *Nomos* lines 36–37; see 2.3 and the [Appendix](#).

²² Compare, for instance, the terrace-sanctuaries in Kos (Asklepieion) and Lindos, both dating around 300 BC (*Lauter 1986*, 106–107 and 290), and see more specifically *Berns 2003*, 26, which concludes: “Für die Platzierung der späthellenistischen Memorialbauten war die Wahl eines exponierten Ortes charakteristisch. Man errichtete sie gewöhnlich nicht in den Nekropolen, sondern an frequentierten Stellen im Zentrum der Städte oder an abgelegenen, aber landschaftlich besonders hervorgehobenen Punkten” (“One of the characteristics of late Hellenistic (burial) monuments was their choice of exposed location. Normally they were not built in the necropolis, but in the centres of cities where one could expect a high density of people. Others were located in very secluded but scenically impressive landscapes”).

²³ See the discussion in 2.3.

²⁴ See examples in *Horde/Purcell 2000*, 429–432 (in their definition this is “the religion of the extractive landscape”).

²⁵ Celebrating a festival on the monarch’s birthday has many parallels; for instance the case of queen Laodike, who, in a letter that has been preserved, accepted honours from the Sardians,

concluded above about the landscape of Commagene as dynastic artefact, the prescribed pilgrimage, twice a month, to the many Antiochan religious and dynastic sites might be described as a symbolic movement from local space to Antiochan space.²⁶

3.1.2 A Temple Tomb (*Hierothesion*) in the Form of a Tumulus

It has often been noted that the word *hierotheresion*, as used in the great cult inscription to describe Nemrud Dağ, is unique.²⁷ The two underlying principles – burying a king in a tumulus and making this tomb part of a religious complex where the buried king is venerated – are not.

From early periods onwards, tombs in the form of a tumulus were common in Anatolia.²⁸ Phrygian tombs from the eighth and seventh centuries BC feature tomb chambers covered by an artificial mound that sometimes consisted of gravel; the tombs of Midas and Alyattes of Sardis, well known throughout antiquity, were executed in this manner.²⁹ The tomb of Alexander the Great in Alexandria may have been covered by a tumulus, and the kings of Cappadocia were buried in tumuli as well.³⁰ The tumuli in North Africa, especially those from Numidia, are also part of this Hellenistic tradition.³¹ The tumulus tomb of Deiotaros II, who died in 43 BC and was buried near Karalar, is contemporary to Nemrud Dağ and shows the application of this Hellenistic tradition in

including a *panygeris* on her birthday, the 15th of Hyperberetaios; cf. *SEG* 39 sv. 1284–1285. On the banquets mentioned in the *nomos*, undoubtedly also to be understood in terms of community building, see Waldmann 1992, 45–49 and Kropp 2013, 170: “royal sponsoring of public banquets was a common practice in the Hellenistic world.”

²⁶ Like the pilgrimage to the Olympic Games that has been described as a symbolic movement from “local” space to “pan-Hellenic” space; on the identity-building function of the Olympic Games in this respect, see Hall 2002, 154–168. In general, see Horden/Purcell 2000, 438–449 (the religion of mobility).

²⁷ The word *hierotheresion* would have been an Antiochan neologism. However, note Şahin 1991b and Hoepfner 2000, 65, mentioning an observation by Pausanias (4, 32, 1) that in the city of Messene he saw a *hierotherysion* with, among other things, statues of gods. Dörner (Dörner 1987, 30) argued that the word should be translated as “sepulchralkultstätte” (“sepulchral cult-place”); in his edition of the text this became “sacred tomb” (see Appendix). For a discussion on the etymology of the term see lastly Crowther/Facella 2003, 51.

²⁸ Fedak (Fedak 1990) deals with the tumulus as a specific category of monumental tombs (56–64, with many examples). See also Berns 2003, 25 and Cormack 2004 (Chapter 1, Historical Background).

²⁹ Cf. *Nemrud Dağ Project* 2, 150–151 and Mellink 1991 for the Anatolian tradition specifically.

³⁰ Venit 2002, 8.

³¹ Cf. Rakob 1979 and Coarelli/Thébert 1988. Lauter (Lauter 1986, 214) describes tumulus-tombs from the Hellenistic period in general as characteristic of what he calls “Hellenistische Randkulturen” (“peripheral Hellenistic cultures”).

Galatia.³² The tumulus-form was thus generally used and had a long pedigree in the (late) Hellenistic world. It seems useful to look, therefore, for more specific parallels, also taking the fact of the existence of a (monumental) sanctuary with the tumulus-tomb into account. The first dynastic tomb which then immediately presents itself as a parallel is the Mausolleion at Halikarnassos, dated to circa 350 BC.³³ The (architectural) tumulus contained a tomb and, because of its location within the city, it was also intended to be used as a temple. The Mausolleion is thus likely to have functioned as a *heroön* for Mausollos – as Nemrud Dağ was intended to be a *heroön* for Antiochos I.³⁴ In his newly built residence Seleukeia in Pieria, king Seleukos I Nikator was buried in a monumental *heroön* which may have been located on top of a nearby mountain. In view of the importance of the Seleucid dynasty for Antiochos I this parallel may be more directly relevant; unfortunately we lack any more detailed information about the complex.³⁵ A parallel chronologically closer to the late Hellenistic period is the so-called *heroön* from Kalydon in Aitolia, built around the end of the second century BC.³⁶ Its location was remote and the tomb was surrounded by an impressive complex, which would have been clearly visible in the landscape. In inscriptions, the builder calls himself the “new Herakles” and his statue is displayed between those of two ancestors in the apse of a cult room. The tomb proper is located underneath this cult room. The writings of Josephus inform us of a similar monument on an even grander scale.³⁷ He

³² Deiotaros II, a friend of Pompey and Cicero, was a Galatian client king and one of the dragomans of the Romans in the East, if we may believe Cicero's *Pro Rege Deiotaro*. The Karalar tumuli lack a modern publication; cf. *Arik/Coupry* 1935, 133–151 and some additional remarks in *Anatolian Studies* 24 (1974), 61 ff.

³³ Here is no real tumulus, although a tumulus form is suggested in the pyramidal architecture on top. There are many more examples of monumental tombs with conical stepped roofs; see *Fedak* 1990.

³⁴ Following the definition proposed in *Berns* 2003, 15: “bauliche Anlagen . . . , die der institutionalisierten kultischen Verehrung realer oder für real gehaltener Persönlichkeiten dienen” (“architectural structures . . . which served as locations for the institutionalised veneration of real persons or personalities deemed to be real”).

³⁵ *Strootman* 2007, 65. We know of this *heroön* through App., *Syr.* 63; all remaining structures at the site date to the Roman period.

³⁶ *Dyggve/Poulsen/Rhomaïos* 1934; *Berns* 2003, 15–17.

³⁷ *Antiquitates Judaicae* XIII, 211–212 (here quoted in the Loeb translation of 1966): “And Simon also built for his father and brothers a very great monument of polished white marble, and raising it to a great and conspicuous height, made porticoes round it, and erected monolithic pillars, a wonderful thing to see. In addition to these he built for his parents and his brothers seven pyramids, one for each, so made as to excite wonder by their size and beauty; and these have been preserved to this day. Such was the zeal which we know to have been shown by Simon in burying Jonathan and building monuments to his family.” Cf. *Nemrud Dağ Project* 2, 151

recalls that the Maccabean king Simon built an impressive monument for his family members at a great height, equal to pyramid tombs, “to excite wonder by their size and beauty.” As with Nemrud Dağ, aspects such as public visibility, a focus on genealogy and monumentality were used here in the creation and dissemination of a dynastic concept.³⁸

There are two further parallels from the late first century BC, both built somewhat later than Nemrud Dağ, which confirm that monuments of this nature were quite common during the late Hellenistic period. The so-called Herodion of King Herod was built in the last decades of the first century BC, and is known through some rudimentary descriptions by Josephus. It has been extensively investigated in recent decades by Ehud Netzer,³⁹ who recently discovered what may have been the king’s tomb, although so far this cannot be stated with certainty. The monument is located in a barren area in the Judean desert and is therefore visible from afar. It consisted of a palace-fort – several storeys high at the summit of a mound – with a palatial complex and settlement at the foot of the mountain. There are general similarities with Nemrud Dağ: the location, the importance of visibility, the monumental scale, and the combination of a tomb with a dynastic architectural building programme – in this case of Herodian palaces.⁴⁰ However, there are no obvious religious aspects to the Herodion, and too little of the architectural decoration and building style has been preserved to see whether there may have been stylistic similarities.⁴¹ The mausoleum of Octavian at Rome, however, does include more specific similarities and will therefore be discussed in some more detail. Octavian became the sole ruler of the Mediterranean world circa 30 BC. Immediately he started working on his own dynastic programme, as architecturally visualised in his mausoleum and the temple for Apollo.⁴² According to Zanker, the mausoleum – “das in

with n. 15 and Kropp 2013, 218. For a deconstruction of Josephus’ use of the term white marble (often not corroborated by archaeological data) cf. Fisher/Stein 1994.

³⁸ Rajak (*Rajak* 1990, 69) characterises the tomb built by Simon with the words grandeur, power symbolism and hybrid Greco-Oriental style. Cf. in general now Tal 2009.

³⁹ *Antiquitates Judaicae* XV, 323–325 and *Bellum Judaicum* I, 419–421. For the archaeological work see the summary in Netzer 1999, 90–108 and Netzer 2006. Cf. also Lichtenberger 2004, 295–310 and Kropp 2013, 137–142; 197–199. The final reports of the 1972–2010 excavations are now being published by R. Chachy and others.

⁴⁰ See Netzer 1996; Netzer 1999/2006; and Kropp 2013, 110–156 for a recent overview.

⁴¹ Note however that it is possible that Arsameia ad Nymphaeum showed a similar combination of a summer-palace, a settlement and a dynastic tomb.

⁴² Cf. Zanker 1987, 80: “Er konzentrierte seine Kräfte auf die beiden Bauten, bei denen es vor allem um seine Selbstverherrlichung ging, den Apollotempel und das Mausoleum” (“He concentrated his energy on two buildings, the Temple of Apollo and the Mausoleum, both serving his self-aggrandisement”).

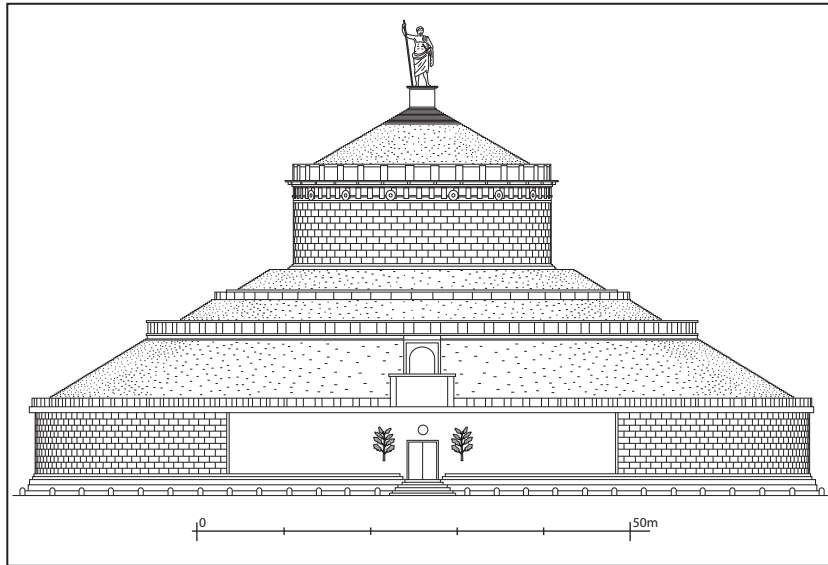


Figure 3.2 Mausoleum of Augustus, reconstruction.

Form und Ausmaß geradezu monströse Bauwerk” (“in both form and dimension an almost monstrous construction” – was above all “eine Demonstration der Größe und Macht des Bauherren” (“a demonstration of the owner’s power and grandeur”).⁴³ Octavian sought to achieve this effect through its colossal proportions and position – “landschaftsbeherrschend” (“dominating the landscape”) according to Zanker – in the city. The monument looked like a tumulus and was probably surmounted by a colossal statue of Octavian.⁴⁴ (Fig. 3.2) The dynastic meanings of the monument are evident. It was called *tumulus Iuliorum*, emphasising the importance of dynastic genealogy.⁴⁵ The mausoleum was part of a larger complex on the

⁴³ Zanker 1987, 80–84, quotes from 80. Cf. Von Hesberg/Panciera 1994; *LTUR* III sv. Mausoleum Augusti (Von Hesberg); Reeder 1992 (mainly dealing with the inspiration for the monument; Alexander’s tomb in Alexandria amongst them); and Davies 2000. In Kreikenbom/Mahler/Schollmeyer et al. 2008, P. Schollmeyer has argued that the Etruscan tradition mattered greatly to Augustus in conceptualising the monument. For monumental tombs in the Roman world in general the overview in Toynbee 1996 (reprint) is still useful as a catalogue.

⁴⁴ Although the whole statue has not been preserved, we know that it existed: a marble head in the Vatican Museums that remains is about 1.5 metres high. Cf. Ruck 2007, 119. Note also that Caesar was given his own cult statue as *divus Iulius* in the so-called room of the Colossus; cf. Severy 2003, 158–180.

⁴⁵ As aptly summarised in Coarelli 1994, 300: “Il fine dinastico sembra evidente: con questo gesto Ottaviano si pone, in pratica, nella posizione di un sovrano ellenistico” (“The dynastic end seems evident: with this gesture Octavian arises, in practice, to the position of a Hellenistic

Campus Martius and related to a *Horologium* dedicated in 10 BC. An Egyptian obelisk served as the gnomon of this calendar-clock, which indicated and recalled, amongst other things, an important moment for the dynasty: Augustus' birthday. This is Zanker's analysis of the mausoleum, a monument that was designed and executed *before* the Augustan visual language was standardised and disseminated across Rome, Italy and the provinces:

The mausoleum dominates through sheer mass – it seems significant that the architect was not able to master a coherent programme. Under the influence of the tense situation before Actium, and forced to impress, no convincing form could be found that would have done justice to the new requirements. The multiple subdivisions, together with the eclectic choice of formal elements that contaminate each other, and the minute decorations, are not able to successfully structure the mass of the building. The situation of competition and the dependency on a foreign iconography have also here led to hypertrophic forms.⁴⁶

The other main element of Augustan dynastic display in this period was the temple for Apollo – Octavian's carefully selected tutelary deity – on the Palatine.⁴⁷ The temple's placement and grandeur gave it a dominant position, while it was located amongst places that were key to Roman cultural memory and thus held strong mythological and historical connections. Next to the temple Octavian built a house for himself, of which construction was initiated in 36 BC. It stood on the south side of the Palatine on terraces that rose above the Circus Maximus, and also included libraries and porticoes. Octavian thus created "the new symbolic centre of power of the Roman Empire" which was "in fact a royal residence in the Hellenistic style."⁴⁸ The temple was inaugurated in 28 BC. As Octavian's house was next to the podium on which the temple stood, he presented himself as

ruler"). See also the remarks on the temple of Apollo below. For Augustus as "son of the deified Julius," see *Hekster 2015*, 162–163.

⁴⁶ *Zanker 1987*, 83: "Das Mausoleum überwältigt durch seine Masse – eine kohärente Gestalt aber vermochte ihm der Architekt bezeichnenderweise nicht zu geben. In der Hektik der Situation vor Actium und in dem Zwang, auftrumpfen zu müssen, hatte sich keine überzeugende Form für den neuen Anspruch finden lassen. Die vielfache Unterteilung, die eklektische Kontamination verschiedener Formelemente und die kleinteilige Dekoration vermögen die Masse nicht wirkungsvoll zu gliedern . . . Die Konkurrenzsituation und das Ausgeliefertsein an eine fremde Bildersprache hatten auch hier zu hypertrophen Formen geführt."

⁴⁷ *LTUR* sv. Apollo Palatinus (P. Gros); *Meyboom 2005*, 233–244; and for the architecture now *Zink 2008*.

⁴⁸ *Meyboom 2005*, quotes from 247. Cf. also 262: "The ancient visitor who entered Rome from the south or west could not fail to see on top of the Palatine the residence of Augustus, as it consisted of a complex of sanctuaries and secular buildings and rose above the Circus Maximus like a royal Hellenistic acropolis." See also *Gros 1996*. For these aspects in general see *Favro 1996* and *Haselberger 2002*.

theos synnaos with Apollo – they were literally sharing the same house – and hence acquired the status of a semi-divine (Hellenistic) king.⁴⁹

The similarities with Nemrud Dağ and the Antiochan programme are significant. With regard to ideological content, both presented the monarch as semi-divine, displaying tutelary deities and astronomical associations in a context that combines tomb and temple. They did so, moreover, as part of a dynastic programme that was highly visible, with impressive monuments placed in conspicuous locations. With regard to the style of this dynastic programme, it is telling that Zanker's analysis of the mausoleum quoted above uses many of the negative value judgements that are encountered in descriptions of Nemrud Dağ as well – a topic that will be fully explored in Chapter 4.⁵⁰

3.1.3 Colossal Statues

Although the Nemrud colossi are in some respects unique, there are many examples of colossal statues in the ancient world.⁵¹ Below the focus will be on what might be more specific parallels; that is: colossi from dynastic contexts in the Hellenistic period. With these is included the Mausolleion at Halikarnassos, which displayed a double life-size quadriga with a driver and the king himself on the peak of the pyramid roof.⁵² What is probably

⁴⁹ *Meyboom 2005*, 244. See also *Pfrommer 2004* which talks about “Architekturpsychologie” (“architectural psychology”) (171) in this respect and argues that what Augustus did was comparable to the self-presentation of the Ptolemaic kings.

⁵⁰ Note “überwältigt durch seine Masse” (“dominates through sheer mass”), “keine überzeugende Form für den neuen Anspruch” (“no convincing form that would have done justice to the new requirements”), “eklektische Kontamination verschiedener Formelemente” (“eclectic contamination of various forms and elements”), “nicht wirkungsvoll” (“not able to successfully structure”), “das Ausgeliefertsein an eine fremde Bildersprache” (“the dependency on a foreign iconography”) and “hypertrophen Formen” (“hypertrophic forms”).

⁵¹ They were used in public religious contexts as early as the Egyptian Pharaonic tradition, for instance the temple at Abu Simbel, where a cliff was transformed into a cult place: several colossal statues of gods and four colossal statues of King Ramses II were carved into the rock in around 1200 BC. Well-known colossi from the Classical Greek period are the statues of Zeus (in Olympia) and Athena Promachos (in the Parthenon, Athens), made by Phidias. The material has been catalogued in *Kreikenbom 1992* (cf. the critical review of *Moormann 1995*); for Rome see now in particular *Ruck 2007*. Other recent literature includes *Dickie 1996*; *Ling/Ling 2000* (Nemrud Dağ is mentioned on page 120); and, for the Roman imperial tradition, *La Rocca 2000*, esp. 9–14 (4. le statue colossali e l'immagine trascendente), and, from a different perspective, *Von Den Hoff 2004*. Note that in the first century AD, Pliny (*N.H.* 34. 39–47), in his section on colossal statues, describes them as rather common in the Mediterranean and provides many examples.

⁵² See *Waywell 1978* and *Hoepfner 2013*. The Mausolleion at Halikarnassos has already been advanced as a parallel in the section on hilltop sanctuaries. For a structural comparison between the Mausolleion and Nemrud Dağ in all aspects, see below.

the most famous colossos from the Hellenistic world, the approximately 32 m high bronze statue of Helios we know as the colossus of Rhodes, dates from circa 300 BC. It may serve to underline the attraction of the genre in the Hellenistic world in general, but it is no parallel to Nemrud Dağ.⁵³ Colossal statues in front of the Pharos in Alexandria probably represented one of the early Ptolemies and his consort and, although presented in a Pharaonic, Egyptian style, they do constitute a useful comparison.⁵⁴ Although Kreikenbom mentions many other examples of exceeding life-size dynastic statues of Alexander and his successors in his monograph on *Kolossalporträts*, these cannot be readily compared to the Nemrud Dağ colossi because of their more modest dimensions.⁵⁵ There is, however, a relevant Seleucid parallel: a colossal head of a horse that has been preserved from Antioch suggests the existence of a colossal statue of the Seleucid king Antiochos IV Epiphanes.⁵⁶ A colossal hand found in the late first-century BC temple of Dushara in Petra (the so-called Qasr al-Bint) suggests that there may have been a statue approximately 7 metres high, but we do not know who was portrayed.⁵⁷ The Roman emperors quite frequently used colossal statues as a means of display.⁵⁸ A colossal statue of Octavian, which most probably decorated his mausoleum, has already been mentioned. Notable later examples are the colossos of Nero/Sol, standing approximately 30 m high at the Domus Aurea; the colossal statues that have recently been unearthed in Sagalassos (Pisidia) and probably portray members of the Antonine dynasty; and the well-known statue of Constantine.⁵⁹

In addition to the difference in scale between the Hellenistic/Roman dynastic tradition briefly presented above and the Nemrud Dağ statues – comparisons are mostly either much larger or considerably smaller – there

⁵³ Cf. Hoepfner 2003.

⁵⁴ If the reconstruction in Empereur 1998 is correct. Cf. now Guimier-Sorbets 2007.

⁵⁵ Kreikenbom 1992, 13–45. On page 35, Kreikenbom sees the Nemrud colossi “als Endpunkt und Synthese der Momente, die in der Geschichte der Kolossalporträts griechischer Herrscher eine Rolle spielten” (“an endpoint, and synthesis of all moments which played a role in the development of colossal portraits of Greek rulers”). He is concerned here with their meaning within Hellenistic royal ideology, not with their form. Apparently he is misinformed about their nature, as he calls them “lebengroß” (“life-size”).

⁵⁶ For the Seleucid presence in and around Antioch – probably one of their main palaces was located on an island in the Orontes – see Strootman 2007, 66–69; Strootman 2013c; and De Giorgi 2016.

⁵⁷ Richardson 2002, 69. For this context, see Chapter 4.3.

⁵⁸ Von Den Hoff (Von Den Hoff 2004, 107) writes on their meaning: “their colossality created an impression of power and divinity, surpassing the human sphere.”

⁵⁹ For the Sagalassos finds see some photos and remarks in Oppen 2008, 23–25.

is also a difference in the life-like appearance of the statues. Unlike the parallels that are of a similar size, the Antiochan colossi do not look like normal statues on a larger scale, but are characterised by “a language of form reduced to rough contours and dimensions.”⁶⁰ In this regard they resemble the Egyptian colossal statues from the Pharaonic periods: apparently naturalism was not deemed to be (so) important.⁶¹ It would therefore seem that the purpose of the Nemrud Dağ colossi was to be visible from afar, and they achieved this purpose very well.⁶² It is notable that the colossi at Arsameia ad Nymphaeum were, if Hoepfner’s reconstruction is correct, much more life-like and detailed, and therefore more in keeping with the Hellenistic tradition.⁶³

The monumental scale of the colossi was intended to convey associations with the extraordinary in many respects – it has been concluded above that the (hilltop) location did the same. This rather general human practice was, at the same time, characteristic for Hellenistic architecture in general.⁶⁴ There also is another general Hellenistic principle which seems to play a role at Nemrud Dağ, and that is the idea that kingship should be publicly visible. Hellenistic dynastic monuments, and in particular colossi, were designed to display power as something tangible.⁶⁵ What ancient visitor would not have been impressed by this monumental achievement – a combination of landscape, architecture and style – and likewise perceived its creator as a monumental figure? The monumental dimensions of his

⁶⁰ Hoepfner 1983, 44: “eine grobe, auf bloße Umrisse reduzierte Formensprache.” For other, less objective, descriptions of this specific feature see 4.1.

⁶¹ It is interesting to note that Strabo, born in Pontus around 64 BC, used the word *kolossourgia* (“a colossus of a work”) to indicate his own *Geography*. In his introduction, he compares it to colossal statues and remarks: “Just as, in colossal statues, we do not seek detail in each individual part but rather pay attention to general aspects [in deciding] whether the whole is finely done, so we must apply the same criteria to these [works].” Cf. Potthecary 2005, 5–26.

⁶² Hoepfner (Hoepfner 2003, 8) argued that “Since monumental statues are often viewed from a distance, some details are emphasised while others are subdued” (“bei monumentalen Bildwerken wegen der Betrachtung aus großem Abstand bestimmte Details verstärkt und andere abgemildert wurden”) to account for the form of the Nemrud colossi, and mentioned, with a figure of them (Fig. 5), that they show “parts that are treated summarily in order to heighten the monumentality” (“summarisch behandelte Flächen, um die Monumentalität zu erhöhen”).

⁶³ Hoepfner 1983, 42–49. Note that this can also be an argument to support the idea that the *hierothesion* with its colossal sculptures was not finished; see 2.3.

⁶⁴ For the thematisation of the importance and meaning of size and monumentality in Hellenistic art theory see Prioux 2007/2008. For the tendency of Hellenistic architecture to strive for monumentality see Lauter 1986; Pollitt 1986, 230–242; and Berns 2003, 9–52 (“Nekropolen und Memorialbauten im späten Hellenismus”), which describes this principle as *Distanzierung*. The introductory remarks in Thomas 2007 are more general on the concept as such.

⁶⁵ For these aspects of Hellenistic kingship see Ma 2003c; Strootman 2007, 9–10 and 259–261; and Strootman 2014, Part III. For the concept of visibility, see 3.6.

statue also served to indicate and underline the divinity of Antiochos I. During the Roman imperial period it would become common for monumental statues to be used to convey religious associations in particular.⁶⁶

The choice for the particular gods that were displayed by the colossal statues, lastly, can only be characterised as stereotypical. Herakles was the standard symbol of the ruler's virtue in the Greek and Hellenistic world. Regarded as the founder of the Macedonian royal house, he already had been used to legitimate many ruling dynasties after Alexander the Great.⁶⁷ There are also frequent examples in the Hellenistic world – and then particularly the Hellenistic East – of displaying local gods such as Tyche, who is here personified as Commagene.⁶⁸ In the same vein many Hellenistic monarchies reinforced their claim to universality by associating their terrestrial monarchy with the heavenly kingship of Zeus – as Antiochos I did.⁶⁹ In Hellenistic dynastic thinking, the dream of a world empire was closely related to the promise of a new golden age, for which the symbol of the sun was of prime importance.⁷⁰ Hellenistic dynasties like the Seleucids therefore often associated themselves with Apollo.⁷¹ Antiochos I might thus have followed a more general Hellenistic pattern here, or, as he more often

⁶⁶ On this aspect of Hellenistic and Roman kingship see *Musti 1982* and *Chaniotis 2003* (with further references). Although the religious associations of the various constituents of Antiochan imagery have been widely discussed, the religious understanding of the colossal could perhaps be further refined. Benveniste (*Benveniste 1932*), demonstrated that “colossal” originally referred to something standing erect; an idea that Vernant (*Vernant 1985*) related to the psychological category of the *double*: in an interplay of identity and difference, the erected stone would replace the person indicated while at the same time it was not just an image of this figure because it was something bigger. In this vein Antiochos I would have chosen exactly the right form to present himself as king and god simultaneously. I owe these references to *Mason 2013*, 32–36.

⁶⁷ The literature on Herakles as a role model is immense – see *Derichs 1950*; *Ritter 1995*; *Huttner 1997*, 198–219 for Commagene; and, most recently, *Bowden/Rawling 2005* and *Hekster 2015*, Chapter 6. For the case of the Attalids and their use of Herakles, see *Kosmetatou 2003*, 167–168. It is interesting to note that a relief of Herakles holding a club has been reported near Zeugma (*Comfort/Ergeç 2001*, 40 with fig. 23). The location is not in Commagene, but at the eastern side of the Euphrates, on a road leading up to the quarries at Kalazan Dağ. Unfortunately, no measurements are given and no date has been proposed. I have not been able to inspect the relief myself and the photo does not allow conclusions on a possible link to Antiochos I.

⁶⁸ *Freyberger 1998*, 24 and 45, with examples. For Tyche, and specifically the personification of Antiocheia, see now *Meyer 2006*. For the *patris panthropos* Commagene specifically see *Meyer 2005*.

⁶⁹ See *Holt 1999*; *Strootman 2007*, 247–248; and *Strootman 2013b*.

⁷⁰ For the role of the sun and its symbolism on Nemrud Dağ more in general, see now *Weber 2009*.

⁷¹ See *Strootman 2007*, 247–248 and now *Strootman 2011*; in Daphne Apollo was the tutelary deity and ancestor of the Seleucid dynasty.

did, he may have looked back at the Seleucids specifically. The choice for – in Greek terminology – Herakles, Commagene, Zeus and Apollo can therefore be understood as a dynastic, Hellenistic choice par excellence, as must be the fact that Antiochos I had himself displayed amidst these gods.⁷²

3.1.4 A Canonical Text: The Great Cult Inscription and the *Nomos*

The great cult inscription and the *nomos* are in some respects unique.⁷³ There are not many other examples of texts that comprehensively explain the context and meaning of the material culture in the context of which they are displayed. However, there are many other examples of monumental writing, and here I would like to focus on that aspect of the inscription first.⁷⁴

Monumental writing was intended to ensure the remembrance of something or someone and thus to create “memory in stone.”⁷⁵ The first epigraphic monuments in Pharaonic Egypt were state monuments with a political meaning. To create memory and remembrance clearly was an important function of these epigraphic artefacts. As such, monumental writing – although most often documenting and interpreting deeds from the past and the present – claimed the future as well. The monuments were meant to endure and to guarantee the evocation of (particular) memories over time.⁷⁶ The Egyptian hieroglyphs are perhaps the best illustration of how this principle functioned in (a largely illiterate) ancient society. Irrespective of what they say, they convey meaning as symbols. The trilingual inscription on the monument built by Darius I at Behistun is another illustration of this

⁷² Perhaps the position of Antiochos I next to the gods (instead of literally amidst) is significant; Mittag (*Mittag 2011*) has argued that Antiochos I tried to bring himself nearer to the gods but did not really assimilate himself with them.

⁷³ For the *nomos* itself, see [Chapter 2.3](#) and [3.1](#) as well as the [Appendix](#).

⁷⁴ See in general Assmann [1992](#), especially Chapter 2 on *Schriftkultur*; Moreland [2001](#), 87–93; Bresson [2005](#); and, for our period specifically, Woolf [1996](#).

⁷⁵ To quote Woolf [1996](#), 25 in his discussion of the forms and mechanisms of the epigraphic habit: “At the very least these devices claimed authority by asserting the monumentality of the text, its place in a cultural (and religious, social and sometimes political) tradition, and its intended permanence. For the illiterate, as for the literate who did not bother to read them, they made clear the nature and status of the text. So too did the setting of inscriptions. Most were originally set up alongside others, in ‘epigraphic environments’ . . . Both the format and location of an inscription might be said to constitute a claim to authority by association, and an assertion of conformity with the accepted norms.”

⁷⁶ Assmann (*Assmann 1992*, 169–174) (*Der monumentale Diskurs: Die Schrift der Macht und der Ewigkeit*) has called this principle “prospektive Erinnerung” (“prospective memory”): irrespective of their content, monumental texts in themselves claim authority about space and time.

practice.⁷⁷ The king addresses himself to the world at large, commemorating his victories in words and images: the aim here is monumentality in the sense of claiming a position in the contemporary world and in history, not mass intelligibility. In the Hellenistic and Roman world, the public contexts of cities were full of monumental writing of this kind. As Hellenistic kingship was all about authority and communication, it comes as no surprise that monumental writing was abundantly used in dynastic display as well.

Although the great cult inscription with the *nomos* must therefore be seen as an attempt to create (dynastic) memory, it differs in several respects from the general Hellenistic practice. It is more extensive, it is more personal, it literally explains the material culture it is displayed with, and it was disseminated and put on public display in a standardised form all over the (target) area. If we take all these elements together, the best parallel for the Antiochan text seems to be the *res gestae* of Octavian Augustus.⁷⁸ (Fig. 3.3) The *Res Gestae divi Augusti* is believed to have been compiled by the emperor at the end of his life; the monumental text was put on display on bronze plates at the mausoleum of Augustus.⁷⁹ These originals have not been preserved. However, as this canonical text was dispersed all over the empire, it is possible to reconstruct the original. The most complete and best-preserved example is known as the *Monumentum Ancyranum*: the monumental inscription on the temple of Augustus in Ancyra (present-day Ankara).⁸⁰ Augustus' original text, which was put on display at his tomb and was part of an extensive programme of dynastic display, deals with political and military successes, but also with what we would now call social and personal elements. The great cult inscription with the *nomos* and the *res gestae* therefore appear to have fulfilled rather similar functions.⁸¹ The chronological gap of approximately 50 years between the two appears

⁷⁷ See Fowler 2005, 134–141 (with earlier bibliography), the conclusion of which I follow here. For Behistun see further Chapter 4.3.

⁷⁸ It is true that the gods, so prominent in the Antiochan *nomos*, are rather absent from the *res gestae*. Religious reformation and innovation, however, characterise the Augustan project as much as the Antiochan. But unlike Antiochos, Augustus did not so much play out this aspect in his canonical text.

⁷⁹ See the new editions of Scheid 2007 and Cooley 2009, both with an introduction and earlier bibliography. For this text and/as monument, see Elsner 1996, 32–53.

⁸⁰ Note that Humann, on his Nemrud Dağ expedition in 1883, also visited Ancyra on the explicit demand of Theodor Mommsen to make an *Abklatsch* of this inscription.

⁸¹ The main difference in content being due to the fact that Antiochos I simply did not have the military successes Augustus cleverly boasted of in order to legitimise his rule. I do not know of a scholar having attempted to compare both texts in a structural way. However, cf. already Bosworth 1999 1: “As for Augustus himself, his propaganda owes much to the Hellenistic ruler cult”; something which was certainly true for Antiochos I as well.

substantial. However, Augustus' *res gestae* was meant as a testament to be added to his tomb after his death. Therefore, it is plausible that the idea of displaying this form of public writing was (already) planned as part of the dynastic programme initiated around 30 BC. In that case the two examples of a canonical text for dynastic display and communication would be almost contemporary.

The great cult inscription appears to have been on public display in *hierotheseia* and *temene* all over Antiochan territory. However, it is striking that at Nemrud Dağ it was placed where it could *not* have been easily seen: at the back of the (thrones of the) statues.⁸² This is difficult to explain. It would be in line with the general concept of late Hellenistic *Memorialbauten* – where the focus is on the whole of the architectural concept and its display, and less attention is paid to individual statues and texts.⁸³ However, in terms of dynastic display and the creation of memory, the inscription does not seem to realise its potential to the full. Another puzzling feature is Antiochos' choice to display his cult inscription and *nomos* in the Greek language alone. In view of the dual Greek and Persian/Iranian execution of his *Bildprogramm* and his search for “inbetweenness,” one would expect a bilingual presentation – in Greek and Persian or Aramaic, for instance. Such bilinguals are known from other Hellenistic contexts – although to my knowledge no combinations of Greek and Persian occur – and can also be found earlier: at Behistun, Darius I used three languages to proclaim his dynasty.⁸⁴ (Fig. 3.4)

3.1.5 *Dexiosis* Reliefs and Other Sculptural Decorations

The *dexiosis* depicts a handshake with the right hand, between two figures, and suggests a warm and close relationship between them. The oldest known *dexiosis* dates to the Assyrian period.⁸⁵ The gesture is also known from Greek monuments, where *dexiosis* takes place between both

⁸² Note, however, that Brijder (*Brijder*, 122 ff.) argues for the existence of a pathway leading the visitor to and by the text.

⁸³ Cf. Berns 2003, 9–52, specifically 35–36.

⁸⁴ For Behistun see Van den Bergh 1983; Fowler 2005, 134–141 with previous literature; and Chapter 4.3 below. For bi- (and tri-) linguals from Ptolemaic Egypt, see Stanwick 2002, Chapter 3. For Greco-Iranian bilinguals (but from the Sassanid period), see Mancini 1988. More in general, see Cotton/Hoyland/Price et al. 2009 and Adams/Janse/Swain 2002, with case studies on Lycia, Phrygia and Cappadocia.

⁸⁵ For an overview of the debate and a convincing interpretation, see Jacobs/Rollinger 2005. Cf. now also Rose 2013.



Figure 3.4 Relief of Darius I at Behistun presenting, in three languages, several generations of forebears to the Achaemenid dynasty.

human beings and mythical figures. The *dexiosis* is equally well known from the Parthian world, where it was probably a ritual and sanctioned gesture.⁸⁶ In Roman culture it was a gesture of friendship that could also indicate the sealing of a contract, while in the later imperial period it suggested a sense of harmony.⁸⁷ The *dexiosis* between Antiochos I and his selected deities has generally been regarded as a sign of the king's apotheosis. This view, in which the king would literally have been welcomed and taken by the gods into their midst, was originally put forward by Humann and Puchstein, who also included the Lion horoscope in their analysis.⁸⁸ This interpretation has been elaborated by Merkelbach, among others, who argued that the *dexiosis* also indicated the gods' symbolic loan of their country to the king.⁸⁹ Based on the Zeugma discovery of part of the great cult inscription, which was previously unknown, Georg Petzl argued that it was a symbol of the help bestowed

⁸⁶ On the meaning of this ritual handshake see Wolski 1969, 315 ff. and Hoepfner 1983, 65.

⁸⁷ *Brill's New Pauly* 5, 834–835 sv. *dexiosis*. For the *dexiosis* and the notion of ritualised friendship in the Greek world, see Herman 1987.

⁸⁸ Humann/Puchstein 1890, 340. For the theme of apotheosis in relation to the Lion horoscope, see most recently Facella 2014.

⁸⁹ Merkelbach 1994, 56–57.

upon the king by the gods.⁹⁰ In the most recent article on the *dexiosis*, Jacobs and Rollinger follow Petzl in their interpretation while convincingly arguing that the gesture primarily had an Oriental background. In that context, however, it was *not* used as a symbol of divine providence.⁹¹ Antiochos I therefore seems to have used an Oriental motif – which was nonetheless well known in the Hellenistic world at large – to give it a new meaning in the context of his own programme.⁹²

Other sculpted decorations include statues of animals: the lion, eagle and bull were standard elements in the Antiochan language of images. The choice of these animals in a funerary context was very common in the Hellenistic and Roman East; especially the lion and the bull stand out.⁹³ Traditionally the lion was regarded as a tomb guardian and hence the animal was most fitting to be placed near tombs, as he might be at Nemrud Dağ.⁹⁴ The power-kingship symbolism of the lion – as it has been used across many cultures and periods – will certainly have played a role also. Lions were depicted frequently in sanctuaries as well.⁹⁵ In the Persian world the lion and bull were standard symbols of kingship.⁹⁶ The most remarkable lion on Nemrud Dağ is, of course, the one representing the famous Lion horoscope. It suffices here to note that the Lion horoscope was an astronomical association that was employed at Nemrud Dağ to underpin the idea that Antiochan kingship was part

⁹⁰ Petzl 2003, 4: “das hilfreiche Eingreifen der Götter” (“helpful divine intervention”); Antiochos I would have overcome many perils “dank der ausgestreckten hilfreichen himmlischen Hände” (“thanks to the outstretched and helpful hands from heaven”). A year later Mittag (Mittag 2004) proposed a more general interpretation; for him the *dexiosis* symbolises “die besondere Nähe” (“the particular closeness”) between the king and a god.

⁹¹ Jacobs/Rollinger 2005, especially 150–152.

⁹² On the basis of the new evidence from Zeugma, Crowther (Crowther 2013, 203) has recently suggested “that the *dexiosis* was a vision elaborated by Antiochus at a later stage of his reign.”

⁹³ Cf. Cormack 2004 and Blömer 2008, 109, which calls it “ein Allgemeinplatz” (“a cliché”). A recent overview (Felicia Meynerson 2003) of the use of animal sculptures in southern Syria, in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, concluded (125): “Zum Repertoire der südsyrischen Skulpturenlandschaft zählen vornehmlich Adler, Löwen, Pferde und Mischwesen Besonderes häufig sind Tieren im Fundmaterial von Heiligtümern anzutreffen” (“The repertoire of sculpture from southern Syria includes eagles, lions, horses and ‘hybrids.’ Most find assemblages from sanctuaries include animals”). The eagle, in particular, was very popular.

⁹⁴ Berns 2003, 33 with references in n. 167.

⁹⁵ Note the monumental (3.5 m) first-century AD statuesque lion relief from the temple of Allat in Palmyra: it is in a distinct local style and somewhat reminiscent of the Nemrud Dağ lions flanking the colossal statues; cf. Butcher 2003, 309 with fig. 140.

⁹⁶ For a discussion of the animal world in the ancient Near East and the symbolic meanings of animals in general, see Collins 2002; the essays Root 2002, and Caubet 2002 are particularly relevant.



Figure 3.5 Tetradrachm showing Ptolemy IV Philometer together with the eagle as symbol of Ptolemaic kingship, issued on Paphos (Cyprus) in 151/150 BC.

of a divine, cosmic order: a well-known principle in Hellenistic royal ideology.⁹⁷

The eagle is known from many Hellenistic contexts. The animal symbolised the supreme kingship of the Ptolemies (Fig. 3.5), but was also a common element in sanctuaries in the Hellenistic East in general.⁹⁸ To use animals flanking a central piece – in this case the four gods and Antiochos I – is a common iconographic scheme.⁹⁹

In summary, the choice of animals that were depicted was common within the context of both Hellenistic monarchy and the late Hellenistic East. As ubiquitous symbols in many cultures and periods, the lion, eagle and bull will have had many religious and cosmological associations. In the case of the Antiochan sites they would also – or perhaps especially – have been selected for their strong associations with kingship. Upon entering an Antiochan site, the animals would have signalled that the visitor was entering a territory governed by the power of the king. The so-called coronation scenes strongly underline this idea.¹⁰⁰

3.1.6 Ancestor Galleries

Claiming legitimacy through ancestry was a common dynastic instrument. The rock relief created by Darius I at Behistun lists, in three languages, several generations of forebears, and thus functions as a foundation charter

⁹⁷ Strootman 2007, 232. Note that the *horologium* on the Augustan Campus Martius in Rome discussed earlier in this chapter stands in this tradition as well.

⁹⁸ See Hazzard 2000 for the first aspect and Freyberger 1998, 59 (with many examples) for the latter.

⁹⁹ It was already an ancient Oriental tradition to have animal figures flanking a central piece. For examples from the Hauran, where lions, sphinxes and bulls were used most frequently, see Dentzer 2003, 195–198.

¹⁰⁰ On these, see lastly Jacobs 2009.

of the Achaemenid dynasty.¹⁰¹ (Fig. 3.4) Ancestor galleries were not at all uncommon in dynastic contexts from the Hellenistic and Roman world.¹⁰² The Mausolleion at Halikarnassos included a display of ancestor statues in the upper gallery, representing the male and female members of the fourth-century BC Satrapal dynasty, beginning with its founder and including Mausollos and Artemisia. This ancestor gallery was probably matched by one showing the preceding fifth-century BC dynasty that ruled Caria. In both cases male and female members of the dynasty were shown, some in Persian attire.¹⁰³ Somewhat later, in 338–336 BC, a Thessalian ruler initiated the building of the so-called Daochos monument in Delphi. The Daochos monument included a group of athletic statues; probably because the builder wanted to legitimise himself by underlining (or claiming) his Greek ancestry.¹⁰⁴ Contemporary is the so-called Philippeion at Olympia. It was dedicated by Philippos II after his victory at Chaironea in 338 BC and contained five statues of family members made from gold and ivory and displayed in a tholos.¹⁰⁵ In the third century BC, the Macedonian king Antigonos Gonatas, who ruled from 283 to 239 BC, had around 20 statues of his *progonoi* placed in a newly built hall in the sanctuary of Apollo at Delos.¹⁰⁶ Towards the end of the third century BC Attalos I of Pergamon displayed his ancestor statues in the same sanctuary.¹⁰⁷ The hemicycle from Memphis dating from the late third century BC may have shown members of the Ptolemaic dynasty, in addition to statues of famous Greek writers and philosophers.¹⁰⁸ In the same period, Ptolemy IV Philopator displayed his dynasty on his *thalamegos*.¹⁰⁹ In the Queen's

¹⁰¹ See Fowler 2005, 134–141 and Fowler 2010, both with previous literature.

¹⁰² A useful collection of case studies is presented in Munk Højte 2002. For a theoretical understanding of the phenomenon, see Helms 1998. For the Hellenistic and Roman periods specifically see Hintzen-Bohlen 1990; Schmidt-Dounas 2000, 102–119; and now Hekster 2015.

¹⁰³ Waywell 1978; Hoepfner 2002, 419; Jeppesen 2002.

¹⁰⁴ Schalles 1985, 130; Hintzen-Bohlen 1990, 134–137; and most recently Geominy 2007. Note that Geominy has now proposed to date the monument between 288 and 278 BC.

¹⁰⁵ Schalles 1985, 130–131; Hintzen-Bohlen 1990, 131–134.

¹⁰⁶ Schalles 1985, 131–132; Hintzen-Bohlen 1990, 138–140; Fleischer 2002, 72 (with further references).

¹⁰⁷ Schalles 1985, 127–135; Hintzen-Bohlen 1990, 140–141. This so-called *Teuthrania-Anathem* is a remarkable dedication, because it shows both mythical heroes and ancestors: apparently a combination of the Classical polis habit of displaying heroes with the Hellenistic *Familiengruppe*.

¹⁰⁸ According to the recent proposal by Sally-Ann Ashton. See Ashton 2003, 14–28, for an overview of earlier opinions and Ashton's new hypothesis that links the instalment of the group to the battle at Raphia.

¹⁰⁹ Hintzen-Bohlen 1990, 141, which apparently does not consider this a real ancestor gallery; see now, however, Pfrommer 1999, 112: "Daß der Oikos nicht dem Dionysoskult im Allgemeinen, sondern dem König gewidmet war, zeigt der Schmuck der Apsidengrotte, in der

oikos, Pfrommer tentatively reconstructed a series of 12 statues with four generations of Ptolemaic kings and queens, as well as Dionysos, Herakles, Zeus and Alexander the Great.¹¹⁰ An example from Thmuis and dated to 200–180 BC underlines that ancestor galleries well fitted the ideological make up of the Ptolemaic dynasty.¹¹¹ It displayed ten statues of gods and both male and female ancestors – and included Alexander the Great. In the Parthian city of Nisa an ancestor gallery from the second century BC has been found – another example may date from somewhat later.¹¹² Republican Rome was full of ancestor galleries in the form of *imagines* of members of elite families made out of wax. (Fig. 3.6) Presumably these were masks that may have been displayed in houses or even worn in funeral processions.¹¹³ Around the middle and towards the end of the first century BC, first Caesar and then Octavian created the genealogy of the *Julii* as going back to Aeneas.¹¹⁴ Octavian displayed statues of his mythical ancestors and previous *Julii* in an ancestor gallery in one of the porticoes of the Forum Augustum. It was suggestively paralleled by a gallery displaying the *summi viri* of the Roman republic. Altogether Octavian presented here a revised image of Roman history.¹¹⁵ (Fig. 3.7)

This brief overview demonstrates that ancestor galleries can be widely found in the Hellenistic world from the middle of the fourth century BC to the late first century BC.¹¹⁶ The examples clearly show why they were used, and this will also be the reason for the presence of ancestor galleries in the Antiochan programme. For Hellenistic kings, descent was one of the most

Marmorstatuen der königlichen Verwandtschaft standen” (“The decorative programme of the apsidal grotto, which featured statues of members of the Royal family, demonstrates that the *oikos* was not dedicated to Dionysius in general but rather to the King”). For this luxury river boat in general, see recently Kropp 2013, 103–104.

¹¹⁰ Pfrommer 1999 with a reconstruction on pages 106–107 (Fig. 148).

¹¹¹ Lembke 2000. See on this aspect with the Ptolemies in general Hazzard 2000.

¹¹² See Hoepfner 1983, 64, with a hypothetical dating of the latter gallery in the late Hellenistic period instead of the imperial period, as suggested by the excavator.

¹¹³ See Flower 1996. For Republican Rome as a society of memory with a strong ancestor culture, see Zanker 1987, 21 ff. (“Familienpropaganda”), Flower 2002, Kragelund 2002, and above all Walter 2004.

¹¹⁴ See the summary in Zanker 1987, 196–217 (196: “Wo immer möglich berief er sich auf die Vorfahren”) (“Whenever possible he drew on his ancestors”). For Roman emperors and their ancestors in general, now Hekster 2015.

¹¹⁵ Zanker 1987, 213: “Ein revidiertes Bild der römischen Geschichte” (“A revised image of Roman history”). For the Forum of Augustus and its decorations see now Spannagel 1999 and Geiger 2008.

¹¹⁶ It would be possible to draw further parallels if dedications by cities of statue groups showing members of Hellenistic dynasties were included. However, although they appear to have performed the same function as the ancestor galleries, they only showed two generations at most and have therefore not been included. See Hintzen-Bohlen 1990, 141–146.



Figure 3.6 Man with portrait busts of his ancestors (“Togatus Barberini group”), Rome, late first century BC.

crucial factors in the legitimacy of their rule.¹¹⁷ Ancestor galleries served to underline this and to make royal legitimacy visible and tangible.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ See *Strootman 2007*, 104–108 on dynastic continuity: “descent was an all-important factor in the identity of individual Hellenistic kings . . . Descent determined a king’s personal charisma and legitimated his rule, for prestige (and disgrace) was hereditary . . . Continuity from father to son was a central claim in royal propaganda” (104 and 105). For the example of the Attalids in this respect, see *Schalles 1985*, 127–136. For Antiochos’ use of the *tiara* in this aspect, see *Young 1964*.

¹¹⁸ Cf. *Hintzen-Bohlen 1990*, 141, which concluded that ancestor galleries would have served “um eine noch nicht auf Dauer gesicherte Machtsstellung innerhalb eines bestimmten Territoriums

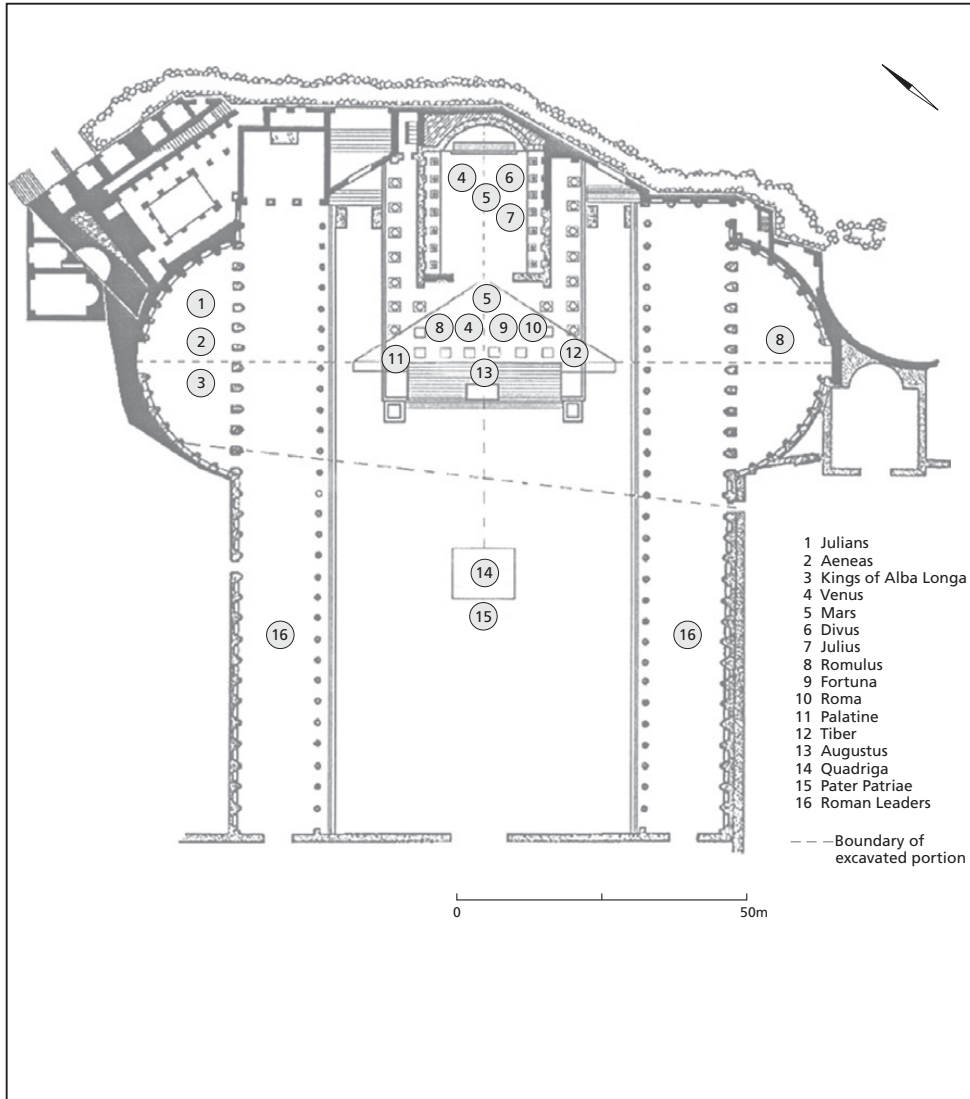


Figure 3.7 Plan of the Forum of Augustus, reconstruction.

The Antiochan initiative was therefore neither unique nor special.¹¹⁹ It was part of a Hellenistic ideological tradition that could be found across the

nach innen und außen auch in einer repräsentativen Form zu untermauern” (“as a means of substantiating and giving a representative form to a position of power, which has not been fully secured within a given territory, and to reinforce this position internally and externally”).

¹¹⁹ Hintzen-Bohlen (*Hintzen-Bohlen 1990*, 141 n. 92) argues that the Nemrud Dağ ancestor galleries have no connection to *Familiengruppen* (“family-groups”) in the Hellenistic period, and Jacobs (*Jacobs 2002c*, 86) recently arrived at the same conclusion (see already *Jacobs 2000b*). Schalles

Eastern Mediterranean, and it fits into the contemporary culture of memory that is so well known from, for instance, Republican Rome.¹²⁰ In one aspect, however, the Nemrud Dağ ancestor gallery was different from the parallels mentioned above, and that is the form in which it was executed. At Nemrud Dağ the ancestor gallery is made out of reliefs while almost all other examples consist of statues or busts.¹²¹ The ancestor gallery on Nemrud Dağ would have looked like a relief wall, as the ancestor reliefs were lined up next to each other. It is possible that this effect was intentional and that the galleries were used as a (Persianising) architectural element.¹²² Practical reason may also have played a role. If Hoepfner's hypothesis is correct, there also was an Antiochan ancestor gallery at Arsameia ad Nymphaeum with statues displayed on columns.¹²³

3.2 Monumentality, Visibility, Ideology and Eclecticism

Having briefly discussed and analysed the most important elements of the Antiochan *Bildprogramm*, if one had to describe Nemrud Dağ and the Antiochan project, *monumentality* could be the primary characteristic.¹²⁴ The hilltop location, the combination of temple, tomb and tumulus with an extensive architectural building programme, the colossal statues, the great cult inscription and the impressive reliefs all contribute to this. Monumentality would have been a central concern, as the visibility and prominence of Nemrud Dağ clearly supported the claims it communicated.¹²⁵

(Schalles 1985, 130) talks about a "formale Übereinstimmung" ("formal agreement") only. When we look at meaning and use, however, the broader overview presented above suggests the contrary.

¹²⁰ See the summary in Hölkeskamp 2006.

¹²¹ The Attalid *Teuthrania-Anathem* dedicated by Attolos I on Delos is the only exception as it consisted of "Standplatten" ("standing reliefs").

¹²² Walls with large-sized figural reliefs are well known from the Achaemenid world; see Root 1979 and Jacobs 2002a.

¹²³ Hoepfner 1983, 24 with fig. 12. Jacobs (Jacobs 2002c, 82) does not mention the possibility of an ancestor gallery at Arsameia and considers them unique in the Antiochan building programme: "Ahnengalerien . . . , die in keinem anderen Heiligtum nachzuweisen sind" ("Ancestral galleries . . . which were not present in any other sanctuary"). Most recent on the ancestor galleries at Nemrud Messerschmidt 2000, and, with a focus on the role of royal women: Strootman 2016.

¹²⁴ On the meaning of monumentality and the monumental in general, see the special issue of *World Archaeology* 22.2 (1990); Bradley 1993; and Mason 2013. For antiquity more specifically cf. Elsner 1994 and Thomas 2007.

¹²⁵ It has been noted that monumentalisation often characterised the formative periods of cultures or societies: it is interesting that in Commagene real monuments seem to have been totally absent before the period of Antiochos I, and largely absent thereafter.

Although related to monumentality, *visibility* must be the second description that characterises the project. Commagene was covered by what was described as an imaginary Antiochan grid that consisted of landscape and material culture actively working together in order to provide a mental template. Visibility lies at the heart of power.¹²⁶ Where the most powerful effect was created by the physical presence of the monarch, royal images achieved the same effect. A Commagenean who saw a *temenos*, with its particular set of Antiochan material culture, would be reminded of the existence of other dynastic cult locations. Although the Antiochan sites were located in relatively distant locations, they were highly visible, and this imaginary grid made Antiochan kingship strongly felt.

Ideology could be the third description that is characteristic of the project.¹²⁷ Of course, we would expect the power of images in a dynastic building project. Here, however, this general principle has been elaborated into a unified system, with texts strengthening images, and vice versa.¹²⁸ Different types of images communicated similar messages, and an ingenious interplay between landscape, image and text had been created. The Antiochan project goes beyond ordinary dynastic display. It is interesting to note that, as has become clear in this section, the closest contemporary parallel in this respect is Augustus and his cultural revolution.¹²⁹

The fourth characteristic should be *eclecticism*. One of the main conclusions of this chapter so far is that none of the elements that make up Antiochos I's *Bildprogramm* are unique, novel or even original. They were taken from a standard, largely Hellenistic, repertoire. The only thing that can be described as unique is *how* they were put together within the Commagenean context. It is striking that the outcome of this strategy of eclecticism has no real parallels. It is possible, therefore, that Antiochos

¹²⁶ Hekster/Fowler 2005, 9. See, more specifically, Ma (Ma 2003a, Chapter 3) who, in characterising the Seleucid Empire, remarks: "The feature that first attracts attention is the massive visibility of Seleucid power" (106).

¹²⁷ For the concept of ideology in general, see Geertz 1973a/b and Pollock 2006. Bulloch et al. 1993 provides a fine overview of Hellenistic ideologies and images.

¹²⁸ Allgöwer 1993 provides the most extensive discussion of this aspect of the project of Antiochos I. For the crucial importance of ideology for the functioning of the Seleucid Empire, see Ma 2003a, 174–178.

¹²⁹ This term – inspired by R. Syme's *The Roman revolution* – was coined by A. Wallace-Hadrill in his review article of Zanker 1987 in *JRS* 79 (1989), 157–164, and has been widely used since, amongst others by G. Woolf in contributions to the Romanisation debate (cf. Woolf 2001, 173–186 and Woolf 2002) and by Robin Osborne in a volume dealing with remarkable changes in Athens between 430 and 380 BC: Osborne 2007. See now extensively Wallace-Hadrill 2008 and, for an application of the model to Augustan Greece, Spawforth 2011.

I purposefully sought to create a result that was unique. If that were the case, this strategy could be described as innovative eclecticism.

Many hypotheses have been suggested to explain why the Antiochan programme was put in place. The analysis above – which has shown *what* Antiochos I did – has suggested answers to the question *why* he did so, as well. However, all these hypotheses can only be properly understood and critically evaluated against the background of contemporary social interaction and behaviour – and not of Antiochos I alone.¹³⁰ It is therefore to the social context of late Hellenistic Commagene that we must now turn.

3.3 In Search for the Social Context

As has become clear from the overview of archaeological data in 2.3, Commagenean archaeology mainly consists of material culture that – in one way or another – relates to Antiochos I. In the present chapter it has so far been concluded that this project can be characterised by monumentality, visibility, ideology and eclecticism. These, however, are very general concepts. To properly understand this project and its characteristics, therefore, we need to analyse it in its social setting, namely late Hellenistic Commagene. It is therefore of crucial importance to try and reconstruct the situation in Commagene during the first century BC *outside* the Antiochan realm. Here we are faced, as 2.4 has shown, with a striking absence of sources.¹³¹ This makes it worthwhile to look into the information provided by the surveys that have been executed in and around Commagenean territory in more detail.

The two surveys carried out by the METU Lower Euphrates Project aimed at providing an overview of the archaeological material that could potentially be rescued before the building of the dams.¹³² Due to their nature and the means with which they were carried out, these surveys do not provide any specific conclusions on the occupation history of the area in the first century BC. The same conclusion applies to the survey conducted during the rescue work undertaken at Zeugma by Comfort, Ergeç

¹³⁰ Note the important observation in *Figs 2002*, xxxiii: “Identity these days is a fashionable term. But it is not very meaningful unless one can show how it manifests itself in social interaction and behaviour.”

¹³¹ Here lies the importance of the 2011 article by Blömer on the Haydaran relief that might indeed be “eines der wenigen Zeugnisse nicht-herrschaftlichen Kunstschaffens aus der späthellenistischen Kommagene” (“one of the few testimonies to artistic activity in late Hellenistic Commagene outside of the royal programme”) (405).

¹³² *Özdoğan 1977* and *Serdaroğlu 1977*.

and others. Their laudable effort has resulted in new data on the use of the Commagenean landscape in the Roman period, but provided no new information about Antiochan Commagene, nor any more general conclusions on the development of the settlement history of the area.¹³³

Tille Höyük, which has been intensively researched for over a decade, should provide a more detailed picture, but unfortunately the final publication on the Hellenistic and Roman periods is still forthcoming. In an overview of the coins from our period found in the excavations, Lightfoot remarked that they demonstrate “the strong local ties of the ancient community, despite the assumed importance of the site as a crossing-point on the Euphrates.” The coins mainly came from Commagene itself and from the mint in Antioch; only a few originated from distant places.¹³⁴ The Tille project was also used by the British expedition for a survey of the surrounding territories.¹³⁵ This survey did not include intensive field walking on a large scale, although this was done in some areas to check the reliability of the results.¹³⁶ What conclusions did the Adiyaman survey reach? It turned out that compared to the Chalcolithic period – with 8 Halaf sites, 13 Ubaid sites and 9 Uruk sites – there was a huge increase to 40 sites in the Early Bronze Age.¹³⁷ Two major ceramic influences can be discerned in this period: an Anatolian one from the North, and a northern Syrian one from the South. However, both displayed local characteristics. The Adiyaman survey did not yield any Middle or Late Bronze Age sites, but it is not clear if this really indicates a major change in settlement pattern. As only a limited number of sherds were found, there is remarkably little evidence from the Iron Age. From historical sources it is known, in political terms, that the area was respectively neo-Hittite, independent (Kummuh), neo-Assyrian and Babylonian during this period. Iron Age Luwian inscriptions tell us that

¹³³ See *Comfort/Ergeç 2001*, 19: “The survey was conducted over six visits between 1996 and 1999. Given the shortage of resources and the vast area covered (about 2500 square km) it can only be considered a preliminary investigation.”

¹³⁴ *Lightfoot 1996*, 140.

¹³⁵ The Adiyaman survey, executed between 1985 and 1991. See *Blaylock/French/Summers 1990* and *Blaylock 1998a* for the results. The survey served as a follow up to the METU activities a decade earlier, and it was also intended to help in building up a better understanding of the pottery sequences found at Tille.

¹³⁶ *Blaylock/French/Summers 1990*, 83. Given this method, it has to be realised that the generalisation of the results is rather limited: it was not really a systematic field survey. However, this is the only survey with quantitative data available for Commagene, and we must be grateful to the British team for providing at least an impression of the *longue-durée* perspective.

¹³⁷ Although one cannot automatically postulate a population expansion on the basis of these figures; see *Blaylock/French/Summers 1990*, 101.

Sargon II of Assyria captured Kummuh and the “62 strong cities” of its land in 708 BC.¹³⁸ The term “Kummuh” probably indicates both the site that was later called Samosata and the region that would later be Commagene. The archaeological record gives no indication for the “62 strong cities.” From the Hellenistic period 44 sites have been identified based on pottery finds, mostly late Hellenistic Red Ware. Of those sites 15 already existed in the Iron Age, while 29 of them continued into the Roman period.¹³⁹ Roman pottery has been reported at 74 sites, a number of which were robbed graves. No major towns appear to have been founded: like in earlier periods, the typical sites are small. The Adiyaman survey thus only reached general conclusions on first-century BC Commagene. The evidence suggests that it was a relatively prosperous period in the history of the area with more settlements than before.

This – rather general and unspecific – picture is confirmed by other surveys in areas around Commagene proper. The Chicago Euphrates Archaeological Survey, for instance, investigated an area at Biricik, south of Samosata but just on the opposite side of the Euphrates. This is one of the few intensive field surveys carried out in the area. In the final publication, Tony Wilkinson concludes that there seems to be a change from nucleated settlements to dispersed ones from the Iron Age to the Hellenistic period.¹⁴⁰ The Tell Rifa’at survey, executed in nearby northern Syria in the late 1970s, even saw a significant repopulation of the landscape during the late Hellenistic period.¹⁴¹ Most other surveys around Commagene confirm the general picture that a relatively dense network of smaller settlements – suggestive of increased population and prosperity – came into being in the Hellenistic period and continued into the Roman era. This has been

¹³⁸ Cf. *Hawkins 2000*.

¹³⁹ *Blaylock/French/Summers 1990*, 117, which argues that their distribution “illustrates the evidence for a dense network of settlements which seem to have been, for the most part, small. It can therefore be argued that the latter demonstrate the prosperity of the period. Large towns have not been discovered but the example of Tille (a mound and surrounding flat settlement) suggests that such did exist.”

¹⁴⁰ *Wilkinson 1990*, 117 (talking about the so-called period K: Seleucid-Hellenistic and Roman-Parthian, late fourth century BC to late third century AD): “The settlement patterns of the Seleucid period provided a conspicuous contrast with what is known of that of the Iron Age. . . This again implies a trend from a centralised nucleated settlement to a dispersed pattern which then prevailed during the late first millennium BC into the first millennium AD. Because of the imprecise data on Iron Age settlement it is difficult to estimate population change, yet the numerous but small Seleucid settlements appeared to contain a slightly increased population.” Note his general remark on the use of the evidence: “the archaeological evidence . . . is too coarse and insensitive to document minutia of invasion and response, and instead it will be used to sketch broad trends in the development of settlement patterns” (114).

¹⁴¹ See *Matthers 1981* with earlier references.

established most recently for the Amuq valley, an area to the north-east of ancient Antioch and not very far from Commagene.¹⁴² A strong increase in human settlement and cultivation was documented there, with as its main characteristics hierarchy of settlement, site dispersal, and the emergence of a web of small urban foci. The growth of Antioch in the Hellenistic and Roman era is, of course, an important factor in explaining this development.

All this is in line with what Susan Alcock concluded already two decades ago, when attempting to integrate survey results for the Hellenistic world at large.¹⁴³ Although her articles aim to “break up” the Hellenistic world – in order to show each region’s responses to a changing context – there appear to have been general developments across the region. One of those is “an overall trend towards higher population levels and more intensive land use,” with especially – but not exclusively – in our region, “clear signs of demographic growth and economic intensification.”¹⁴⁴ Conclusions on Antiochan Commagene in this vein must remain very general, and therefore rather tentative.¹⁴⁵

We must conclude, therefore, that our search for Commagenean social context has largely been in vain. We know frustratingly little about the inhabitants of late Hellenistic Commagene and can say nothing with certainty about their ethnic background or cultural identity. It is often postulated that the population of Commagene will have consisted of people originally Greek and Iranian and that there (still) will have been Iranian elites around in Hellenistic Commagene. This, however, remains speculative, and also where it concerns Asia Minor in more general terms.¹⁴⁶ Indeed there are documents mentioning or testifying to the existence of

¹⁴² Gerritsen/De Giorgi/Eger et al. 2008, especially 249–260.

¹⁴³ Published in two overlapping articles: Alcock 1993b and Alcock 1994. See now also Alcock/Gates/Rempel 2003, and more in general, Alcock/Cherry 2004.

¹⁴⁴ Quotes from Alcock 1993b, 170 and Alcock 1994, 187. Gatier (Gatier 2003, 109) reached a similar conclusion when discussing urbanisation in Seleucid Syria: “On constate, au II^e siècle, un mouvement général de construction dont la signification et l’origine ne sont certainement pas simplement politiques et militaires, mais doivent être liées à une conjoncture économique favorable” (“In the second century one can determine a general movement of construction of which the meaning and origin are certainly not only political and military, but must be connected to favourable economic conditions”). See now also Bjerg/Lind/Sindbaek 2014.

¹⁴⁵ Shipley 2002 comes to a similar negative conclusion with regard to Greece.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Briant 1985; 2006; and 2015. In the latter two articles Briant convincingly argues that previous scholarship has overestimated the importance of the role of Iranians in Asia Minor in the Hellenistic period. Kropp (Kropp 2013, 358) remarks: “what little is known about the native culture of Kommagene points to a Semetic, not Persian, population.” Olbrycht 2013 does not deal with our region or period. For the relation between local elites and Hellenistic kingship more in general, see Dreyer/Mittag 2011.

“Persians” in Asia Minor in the Hellenistic period.¹⁴⁷ It is a moot point, however, if we should understand this (rather limited) evidence in ethnic, diasporic, religious (in the sense of Zoroastrian) or even cultural terms.¹⁴⁸ Our ignorance is also due to the archaeological record as it has been investigated: so far there have been few archaeological initiatives that look beyond the Antiochan dynastic image.¹⁴⁹ This means that we have very little social context to understand how the Antiochan *Bildprogramm* manifested itself in social interaction and behaviour within the kingdom itself.¹⁵⁰

This negative observation is, however, crucial for all interpretations on late Hellenistic Commagene. It implies that it is *not* possible to postulate a direct relationship between Antiochos I and Commagene, between the king and his people, between dynastic representation and social context, or between Greek-Persian/Iranian elements in visual imagery and Greek-Persian/Iranian (ethnic) elements in society.¹⁵¹

3.4 Inventing Traditions in the Hellenistic World

We have seen above that the archaeology of Antiochan Commagene largely consists of a standard repertoire of symbolic material culture through which

¹⁴⁷ Briant 2006/2015 and Mitchell 2007 provide an overview of the evidence and the debate.

¹⁴⁸ De Jong 2017.

¹⁴⁹ However, this is a broader problem that is not only typical of Commagenean archaeology: for Hellenistic archaeology as a whole there is still a striking absence of “social context” in comparison to “elite representation” – although these are not at all mutually exclusive categories as some scholars think. Cf. Frézouls 1987.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Dunand 2006, 139: “Mais il faut dire qu’on n’a aucun moyen de vérifier la portée de l’initiative d’Antiochos” (“But one has to admit that we have no way to verify the scope of Antiochus’ initiative”).

¹⁵¹ As already seems to be more or less suggested by Wagner (Wagner 1987, 181) who wrote about the Antiochan programme: “Für die Ewigkeit konzipiert, stützte er sich weitgehend auf königliche Kreise sowie die Oberschicht des Reiches und vermied bewußt eine enge Verflechtung mit einer ‘Volksreligion,’ wie wir sie aus dem benachbarten Fürstentum Edessa kennen. Antiochos I. war nicht bereit, seinem Volk mehr als eine Statistenrolle in seinem Kult zuzuweisen; dieser war vielmehr ausschließlich auf den Gottkönig und die Erinnerung an seine Ahnen zugeschnitten und lief ohne innere Anteilnahme der Allgemeinheit ab. Es wäre daher zu verstehen, wenn diese der zunächst bereitwillig empfangenen Wohltaten bei den monatlich zweimal wiederkehrenden Kultfeiern auf lange Sicht müde wurde” (“Designed for eternity, he relied largely on royal circles, as well as the upper class of the Empire, and deliberately avoided close ties with a ‘popular religion’ as we know it from the neighbouring principality of Edessa. Antiochus I was unwilling to assign his people more than the role of mere extras in his cult. The latter was aimed almost exclusively at divine kingship, and focused on the memory of his ancestors, while it was conducted without empathy for the general public. It is therefore plausible that, despite the readily received benefits, in the long run the population grew tired of the recurring cult ceremonies which were celebrated twice a month”).

a dynastic image is expressed and made to work. It has also been concluded that we know far too little about the social context of this *Bildprogramm* to simply understand it as some type of Commagenean tradition. However, this is what most interpretations do when equating a Greek-Persian/Iranian dynastic image with a Greek-Persian/Iranian geographical context. In this section, therefore, an alternative approach will be explored that does not reason from “tradition,” but instead reasons from “the invention of tradition.”¹⁵² Originally formulated by Eric Hobsbawm, the concept of “the invention of tradition” is now widely used and can be seen often applied, also in Classical Studies.¹⁵³ What makes the concept particularly interesting for Antiochan Commagene, so it seems, is the active role material culture has been shown to play with the invention of traditions. Below three case studies are presented in which the invention of tradition plays an important role. We will briefly look at what has been called “ethnic manoeuvring” in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, at Hasmonean kingship in Judea and at the behaviour of two so-called Roman client kings in North Africa. These case studies function as rather general comparisons illustrating what inventing traditions is about, and at the same time (potentially) direct parallels to Antiochan Commagene. As has been shown above, the dynastic image of Antiochos I fits general (late) Hellenistic principles and ideas very well. It may therefore be illuminating to discuss some case studies on the structuring of composite identities in material culture from other places in the late Hellenistic *oikumene*.

3.4.1 Ethnic Manoeuvring in Hellenistic Egypt

When the Macedonian general Ptolemy began ruling Egypt in the late fourth century BC as successor of Alexander the Great, he was initially

¹⁵² Inventing traditions is one out of many more ways to create cultural memory, and the concept thus functions in the wider context of *das kulturelle Gedächtnis* (see the introduction to this chapter, n. 10). Hobsbawm defined the invention of tradition as follows: “Invented tradition is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolical nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historical past” (E. Hobsbawm, Introduction: inventing traditions, in: *Hobsbawm/Ranger* 1983, 1–14, 1). For a more extensive discussion of the concept, see the introduction to *Boschung/Busch/Versluys* 2015.

¹⁵³ See, for instance, *Colivicchi* 2008, or *Howe* 2013. The articles in *Boschung/Busch/Versluys* 2015 now take stock of current theoretical understandings, explore the application of “inventing traditions” for antiquity and underline the importance of the concept for our understanding of the Hellenistic-Roman world in particular. I refer to this book and its bibliography for all further background. Although not explicitly drawing on “the invention of tradition,” the analysis of *Andrade* 2013 (dealing with Commagene in Chapter 2) is in the same vein.

a foreigner, and therefore his kingship had to be recast in a local idiom. In order to imply continuity he had to make references to two different pasts. He claimed that he was entitled to rule firstly by referring to the Macedonian past and suggesting that he was the new Alexander. He also claimed his legitimacy by referring to the Egyptian past and by suggesting that he was the new pharaoh. His successors built this principle into an elaborate symbolic system with repetitive structures. For example, in the enthronement ritual at Memphis, the Ptolemies were presented as pharaohs to the Egyptian priests and people in the central hall of the great temple of Ptah during the entire Ptolemaic period.¹⁵⁴ In Alexandria, however, the Ptolemies behaved and displayed themselves as the Hellenistic kings of an eastern Mediterranean maritime empire simultaneously.¹⁵⁵

It is interesting to take a closer look at the construction of a tradition with two main cultural components – in this case Macedonian/Greek and Egyptian – by focusing on what has often been called the creation of a new god: Sarapis.¹⁵⁶ The case of Sarapis has long attracted attention because it appears that the god was created *ex novo* by the early Ptolemies. Sarapis rapidly gained popularity, and in the Roman imperial era he could be encountered everywhere around the wider Mediterranean; his image as a bearded Zeus looked distinctly and familiarly Greek. The question of the origin of Sarapis was already debated in the Roman period itself when it was generally believed that Sarapis was the Greek form of the old Egyptian god Osiris-Apis, who was traditionally venerated in Memphis.¹⁵⁷ The Greek form – or interpretation – of this god as Sarapis was therefore not created out of thin air by the Ptolemies. From the sixth century BC onwards there were large groups of Greeks in Memphis. Initially they were serving in the army of pharaoh Amasis, and, with other foreigners, they venerated Osiris-

¹⁵⁴ Samuel 1993 (with a response by D. Delia) provides an overview of the discussion. Cf. recently Thompson 2003, 105–120; Strootman 2007 (with p. 277 for the Memphis ceremony that lasted until the end of the dynasty in 30 BC); McKechnie/Guillaume 2008; and specifically Murray 2008.

¹⁵⁵ On these two modes of the function of Ptolemaic royal ideology, see recently Dunand 2006, 129–133, with the example of the best-known celebrations from the Ptolemaic period: the (Greek) *Ptolémaia* honouring Dionysos and the quintessentially Egyptian celebration of the victory of Horus in his temple at Edfu. Note that this was not a dichotomy. Also in Alexandria, for instance, the Ptolemies presented themselves as pharaohs; see Guimier-Sorbets 2007.

¹⁵⁶ The literature on this topic is immense, but some well-written recent overviews enable a relatively quick familiarisation. What follows is based on these texts, to whom I also refer for earlier bibliography: Borgeaud/Volokhine 2000; Malaise 2000; Malaise 2005; Schmidt 2006; Pfeiffer 2008 and Bricault/Versluys 2015.

¹⁵⁷ Note that in fact it is more likely that Sarapis is related to Soros-Apis, which is to say the dead and embalmed Apis bull lying in a funerary coffin (*soros*).

Apis as Oserapis. It was through the early Ptolemies, however, that the god acquired his definitive name, Sarapis, and his new Mediterranean image. In what we should therefore call the Hellenistic appropriation of the (Greek-Egyptian) Oserapis, the creation of a new image was crucial.¹⁵⁸ This image was probably strongly Hellenistic – its precise nature during the early Hellenistic period remains, however, unknown.¹⁵⁹ The success of the new image is remarkable; most particularly in the Roman period. Opinions about the meaning of the “creation” of Sarapis vary greatly. It was often perceived as an attempt by the Ptolemies to unite the main ethnic groups in their realm in a composite cult with Greek and Egyptian elements – the same line of reasoning is frequently followed with regard to Antiochan Commagene. There are no indications, however, that Sarapis was popular among native Egyptians. Moreover, there are no initiatives by the Ptolemies known to disseminate the god outside Alexandria. On the contrary: it appears that Sarapis was largely a dynastic god venerated in court circles, and it is only from the Roman period onwards that he can be designated as an Alexandrian city god. Thus, in the (late) Hellenistic period, Sarapis was not an Egyptian tradition that had grown from the intermingling of Greek and Egyptian elements in society, at all. Sarapis would only develop into a tradition during the Roman period – in terms of identity being a poliadic deity referring to Alexandria then and not displaying the confluence of Greek and Egyptian that was the Ptolemaic Empire.

The so-called Hellenisation of Isis constitutes another interesting parallel. Together with Sarapis, Isis became one of the tutelary deities of the

¹⁵⁸ Schmidt (*Schmidt 2006*, 293) rightly emphasises what is the decisive element of the new cult foundation, and central to its success: “Der Erfolg dieser Einführung des altägyptischen Gottes Osiris-Apis unter einem gräzisierten Namen beruhte ganz entscheidend auf der Konzeption eines neuen Bildes, daher wurde auch in den schriftlichen Nachrichten ein so großer Wert auf die Legenden um die Kultstatue des Gottes gelegt. Auch wenn die These von einem völlig neuen <Gott aus der Retorte>, der von einem Priestergremium geschaffen worden wäre, für den alexandrinischen Serapis nicht haltbar ist, verdient der medientechnische Coup, der dem ersten Ptolemäer zugeschrieben werden muß, doch höchste Bewunderung” (“The success of the launch of the ancient Egyptian god Osiris/Apis under a Hellenised name was largely based on the conception of a new image. In the written texts there was also great emphasis placed on the legends surrounding the cult statue of the god. Even if the idea of a brand new god coming out of the test-tube of a laboratory, created by a panel of priests, is not tenable for the Alexandrian Sarapis, the media coup, which can be attributed to the first Ptolemy, deserves the highest admiration”). See also *Sfameni Gasparro 2007*, 65: “What will define the personality of the god, giving him his specific identity, irreducible to the mere sum of his Greek and Egyptian components, is the definition of his image.”

¹⁵⁹ Recent research has rightly discarded earlier attempts to project the image of the seated, bearded Zeus figure with a dog, which is well known from the Roman period, back to the early Hellenistic period and connect it to Bryaxis.

Ptolemies, especially after the battle at Raphia in 217 BC where they were the saviour gods of Ptolemy IV Philopator.¹⁶⁰ From this period onwards some statues of the Ptolemaic queens appeared almost identical to those of Isis, and, in the epitome of that tradition, the last Ptolemaic queen, Cleopatra VII, presented herself as the living Isis on earth. With appropriating Isis the need for a new image must have been even greater than with Sarapis, as Isis was an ancient and important Egyptian goddess with a specific and established iconography. The well-known Isis aretalogies must certainly be interpreted in this vein: they were literally Hellenising the Egyptian Isis.¹⁶¹ But image was perhaps still more crucially important than text.¹⁶² Therefore, the millennia-old hieratic style in which Isis was displayed was radically changed, as were her attributes and clothing. One could indeed describe this as an iconographic revolution.¹⁶³ (Fig. 3.8) What were the reasons for the creation of this “new” Isis, and how was the “new” goddess distributed and received? A recent and attractive interpretation sees the Hellenisation of Isis as an attempt to popularise Isis with both the new rulers and inhabitants of Egypt – as an attempt, so to speak, mainly by Egyptian priests to adjust to a changing world and to reposition themselves.¹⁶⁴ Although Isis was certainly worshipped in Alexandria and Egypt, she would become most popular in the Mediterranean at large.¹⁶⁵ This example of Hellenistic eclecticism, therefore, proved to be very successful, in particular on a more global scale.¹⁶⁶

What can be learned about late Hellenistic Commagene from these two relatively well-documented case studies? First, that a new image was central to the propagation and dissemination of new ideas, and that it apparently was not a problem if this new image and the ideas behind it had a composite

¹⁶⁰ Bricault 1999.

¹⁶¹ Versnel 1990. See Versnel’s general conclusion on the aretalogies on pp. 43–44: “So one cannot but conclude that the aretalogies of Isis are a genuine Hellenistic creation – very comparable to the creation of Sarapis himself – in which Greek elements dominate without, however, blotting out the Egyptian-oriental contribution.” For the most recent overview of the debate and its bibliography, see Sfameni Gasparro 2007 and Bricault/Versluys 2015.

¹⁶² Malaise (Malaise 2000, 1) has underlined that it was in the image of the goddess that the highest degree of Hellenisation can be observed: “La transformation la plus manifeste de la déesse est d’ordre iconographique . . . Cette transformation n’est pas seulement affaire de mode ou d’esthétique car la plupart des nouveaux attributs lui ont été prêtés par des consœurs du panthéon hellénique” (“The most manifest transformation of the goddess is iconographic . . . This transformation is not just a matter of fashion or beauty, seeing that most of these new attributes were already known from her sister goddesses in the Hellenistic pantheon”). See now also Bricault/Versluys 2015, 26–34.

¹⁶³ Sfameni Gasparro 2007, 64–65.

¹⁶⁴ Malaise 2000, 17–19; Malaise 2005, especially Chapters 7 and 8.

¹⁶⁵ Bricault 2013 is the best recent overview. ¹⁶⁶ See Versluys 2015a, especially 148–149.



Figure 3.8 Image of the goddess Isis as popular in the Hellenistic and Roman Mediterranean, Rome, first century AD, now Museo Capitolino.

character.¹⁶⁷ Second, that this composite character had no simplistic, direct relationship to the identity of the image, or the identities of the population at large. Third, that the composite characteristic could mean different things. What makes the cases of Sarapis and Isis so interesting is that they only appear to be similar. Both show a blending of Egyptian and Greek traditions, but neither of them was directly created to facilitate integration between Egyptians and Greeks. Therefore, to say that we are dealing here with a coming together of cultures or blending is certainly true, but explains nothing. With Sarapis the initiative came from the court, and served dynastic interests. With Isis, the initiative appears to have been on the side of the Egyptian priests, due to the desire to keep up with current Hellenistic cultural and religious trends.

¹⁶⁷ For another illustrative example of the making of a composite image in Ptolemaic Egypt, the crown of Arsinoë II, see *Nilsson 2012*.

What does all this say about the social context these images were functioning in? It is important to try and take the argument somewhat further in this direction, as there are not many contexts from the ancient world where we are better informed about how processes of structuring identity worked in social interaction and behaviour than Hellenistic and Roman Egypt.¹⁶⁸ For example: study of the abundantly rich textual record, in which all kinds of Egyptian and Greek names and persons are found, shows that native Egyptians could use Greek names – and behave as Hellenised – in some contexts while remaining Egyptian in others, and vice versa. These persons had a Greek and an Egyptian name and they wore the identity of their Greek mask on the one occasion and the identity of their Egyptian mask on another – this is what has been coined code-switching in 1.2.¹⁶⁹ The implications of this observation are crucial, as they imply that Greek and Egyptian are, in fact, social definitions (alone) and not ethnic ones.¹⁷⁰ In a similar vein, there exists in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt a category characterised as “Persian by descent.” Often this category describes what are in fact Hellenised Egyptians, while later on, in the Roman period, it seems that the qualification evokes associations with military status even more in general.¹⁷¹ For material culture there are many examples underlining this picture. The Dioskourides sarcophagus, for instance, dating to the mid second century BC, belonged to a member of the ruling elite that was onomastically Greek, but thoroughly Egyptian as far as self-presentation in the mortuary sphere was concerned.¹⁷² Egyptian sarcophagi may therefore have contained mummies of people who played a largely Greek role in life; a process that has been called ethnic manoeuvring.¹⁷³ Apparently we are dealing – in text as well as in material

¹⁶⁸ Due to the large amount of detailed data as they have become available through papyri. See, for instance, the many important studies by Willy Clarysse and Jan Quaegebeur in this domain. An overview of the discussion and its implications can be found in *Bagnall 2006*. See also *Stephens 2003*, especially Chapters 1 and 5; *Ashton 2003*, 29–39; *Sfameni Gasparro 2007* and *Moyer 2011*.

¹⁶⁹ Social reality was, of course, more complex than this definition of code-switching suggests; see *Derchain 2000*; *Versluys 2010*; *Moyer 2011*; and *Poblome/Malfitana/Lund 2013*.

¹⁷⁰ See already *Alston 1997*, which shows how ethnicity was used, especially by the Romans, to create what in fact are social categories.

¹⁷¹ *La'da 2002*, 229–271, and recently *Vandorpe 2008*.

¹⁷² Cf. *Collombert 2000* and *Baines 2004*, 42–44.

¹⁷³ *Baines 2004*, 43. Probably we could also imagine a person of Syrian descent (for instance) trying to play these roles as there is no real reason to assume that the use of ethnic (culture-) styles for social manoeuvring is restricted to people from the ethnic groups those styles originally belonged to. This will become particularly clear in the Roman period, when a Roman official in Alexandria could use the Greek cultural scenario in the cultural sphere, while applying the Egyptian one in the mortuary domain.

culture – with a system in which a certain type of behaviour, with its specific style, was related to a certain context or role.¹⁷⁴

Let us now turn to Hasmonean Iudea, a Levantine area geographically located roughly between Alexandria and Commagene. Here we deal with a small kingdom that came to exist through the failing central authority of the Seleucids – and we see the ruling dynasty cope with quite similar problems as Antiochos I with regard to its self-presentation. Comparable to what has just been described for Hellenistic Egypt, a solution is found in the social application of what we could call “ethnic styles.”¹⁷⁵

3.4.2 Inventing Hasmonean Kingship

Around 150 BC, under the slowly disintegrating Seleucid Empire, Simon was the first Hasmonean king who was in a position to display some form of Iudean autonomy.¹⁷⁶ To do so, he adorned the traditional high priesthood with new supremacy. This became visible through new forms of ritual and novel festivals – innovations that were presented as restated native traditions.¹⁷⁷ All this was part of the creation of a new, truly dynastic image in which Simon placed himself in the context of divine worship. A new chronological era was established and Simon had set up, in bronze, a declaration by the people for their “high priest, commander and ethnarch in perpetuity” – a text that was displayed in prominent places across the kingdom. The tomb Simon built for his family in their ancestral village – power symbolism in an eclectic Greek and Oriental style – has already been mentioned earlier in this chapter (3.1). Under his successor Hyrcanus this dynastic image was further developed. Coins were struck, and popular participation in dynastic reforms seems to have been a central concern for the king. In 104 BC the diadem and the title of king were adopted by Hyrcanus’ successor Aristobulus, who styled himself as *philhellen*.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ See more extensively Versluys 2010 and 2013a.

¹⁷⁵ As has recently been argued in comparable terms in Schwentzel 2013 as well.

¹⁷⁶ For the disintegrating Seleucid Empire, see Ehling 2008. For what follows I have consulted from a large bibliography: Hengel 1989; Rajak 1990; Hyldahl 1990; Rajak 1996; Gruen 1998; Levine 1999; Sartre 2001, 303–370; Rajak 2002; Gruen 2003; Johnson 2004; Kropp 2013 (summarising his findings on pp. 367–369); and Eckhardt 2017.

¹⁷⁷ Rajak 1996, 103: “This imagining . . . had been generated out of memories of the first temple, to suit the requirements of the second . . . Such restated ‘native’ traditions would be more powerful than any external influences in shaping the way in which rulers could present themselves.”

¹⁷⁸ Something Josephus describes as a landmark: *Antiquitates Judaicae* 13, 301. Cf. Eckhardt 2017, 250: “At the core of Hasmonean dynastic legitimacy lies a carefully constructed political memory”; later on Eckhardt talks about “the uses of historiography” in this context.

As with all Hellenistic kingdoms, Greek elements were clearly visible in the Hasmoneans' identity building. A much-discussed phrase in 2 Maccabees (4.12/13) is particularly illuminating with regard to the question about what these Greek elements meant and why they were used. This is the first known appearance of the word *hellenismos*, which is used in the text as a metaphor of opposition, as a kind of negative self-definition indicating "doing things the other (read: wrong) way." The passage has often been used to suggest the existence of a dichotomy between Judaism on the one side and Hellenism on the other. In reality, however, the Hasmonean kings were in many respects as Hellenistic as many of their counterparts, and when in the early second century BC a Greek gymnasium – symbol of Greek culture and society – was introduced in Jerusalem, the Jewish high priest was quick to install it on his own initiative.¹⁷⁹ Hasmonean palatial architecture is closely linked to that of Hellenistic *basileia*.¹⁸⁰ It is much more likely, therefore, that the argument was mainly rhetorical or served to indicate a rather different opposition – in this case perhaps one between town (Hellenism) and countryside (Judaism). Be that as it may, the dichotomy between Judaism and Hellenism indeed is "deceptive and misleading."¹⁸¹ Even if some aspects of *hellenismos* were rejected in a particular period for specific reasons, other aspects could, during the same period, be embraced. It therefore seems pointless to try to measure Hasmonean rule in terms of Greekness. As we have seen in Hellenistic Alexandria, here also a certain type of behaviour, with its specific style, seems to have been related to a certain context or role.

As the Hasmonean invention of tradition seems to have a lot in common with the Antiochan project, it is worthwhile to try and explore this parallel somewhat further, and ask what "Greek" actually meant within the Hasmonean project. What role did it play and how did Greek elements make the Hasmonean dynastic project function? Rajak proposes to make a distinction between *Hellenisation* and *Hellenism* in this respect. Hellenisation is defined as an acculturation process stretching out over at least several generations or even a longer period of time. On the contrary, Hellenism is the conscious appropriation of things Greek in a specific time

¹⁷⁹ Gruen 2003, 264. See also 269: "Even in the reign of Jannaeus, most conspicuous for independence of Seleukid influence and spread of Jewish nationalist power, the Hasmoneans still operated within a Hellenistic world to which they had adapted rather than one which they had rejected."

¹⁸⁰ As demonstrated in Kropp 2013, 110–115. For Hellenistic *basileia*: Hoepfner/Brands 1996.

¹⁸¹ See for 2 Maccabees and its various interpretations Will/Orrieux 1986; Himmelfarb 1998; Gruen 2003 (267 for the qualifying quote); and Honigman 2014.

and context.¹⁸² What is it that we see in Hasmonean Iudea? A crucially important socio-political development in this period was the rise and fall of an independent Iudean state – a state with a territory, a monarchy, dynastic succession and permanent authority. Like Commagene, Iudea was a Hellenistic kingdom dependent on a complex interplay of power-politics in an unstable environment. In this context, Greek elements were used or rejected purposefully and strategically. In the early second century BC, for instance, Iudas advertised himself as non-Hellenic to stress his local identity, while Simon, as discussed above, added overtly Greek features to many aspects of public life a few decades later. What we see is Hellenism. The way the Hasmoneans make use of (cultural) elements from the past and the present in order to construct an identity for their reign is instructive as a parallel to what happened in Commagene as well. In their creative use of history – many Hasmonean innovations are pervaded by archaism – the Hasmoneans often made use of an invented past. Script as used on coins, for instance, was sometimes deliberately archaic palaeo-Hebrew to evoke specific (religious) associations. It has already been concluded that the Hasmoneans made use of the present as well, by sometimes being Greek and sometimes being non-Greek. The Hasmoneans were presented as non-Greek in a specific context and for specific purposes, to indicate, for example, that they were preserving the true faith. But that did not mean that their court or their people were non-Greek. Only a generation after the monetary palaeo-Hebrew inscriptions, coins were minted with well-known Hellenistic symbols such as the star and diadem. This is not due to a change in the ethnic make-up of late Hellenistic Iudea, but rather seems to be a variation on the socio-political application of cultural concepts expressed through material culture. Coins with palaeo-Hebrew will have evoked rather different associations than coins with stars and diadems – although, in their own way, they will probably both have signalled the (divine) authority of kingship.

A final, remarkable parallel between Hasmonean Iudea and Antiochan Commagene is the important role Persian elements play with dynastic

¹⁸² *Rajak 1990*; see p. 66 for a characterisation of Hellenism as a process “where there is at least some indication that the agents see a real significance (one that might be, say, political or religious) in the Greekness of those customs. The questions that the historian will then want to ask will be about the factors which promoted Hellenism or anti-Hellenism in particular circumstances, involving explicit pressure from above, commercial requirements, international contact, intellectual links, or other matters; and about the consequences of different choices.” And p. 69 for the meaning of such elements: “And they are acts of political importance surrounded by ceremony and display, such that they can only be seen as consciously chosen and contrived.” See now also the studies *Schwartz 2001* and *2010*.

legitimation. Hasmonean kings often presented the Persians as the guarantors of their own, Jewish tradition.¹⁸³ Like Antiochos I, the Hasmoneans thus participated in an “Achaemenid revival”; in their case mainly out of political motivations and rather differently than Antiochos I.¹⁸⁴ I propose to call such ideas and associations revolving around Persia and appropriated in specific contexts for specific (socio-cultural or political) reasons *Persianism* (see further [Chapter 4.2](#)).

3.4.3 “Client Kings”: Herod the Great and Juba II

The examples discussed so far have shown how Ptolemies and Hasmoneans created specific identities for their Hellenistic kingships with the use of invented traditions, local elements and Hellenism; and, at least in case of the Hasmoneans, Persianism. Discussing processes of ethnic manoeuvring in Hellenistic Egypt made clear that such a strategic appropriation of cultural concepts and ethnic styles for social reasons seems to have been a general characteristic of the behaviour of inhabitants of the Hellenistic world, and that it was not confined to the king and his circle alone. Invented traditions, local characteristics, Hellenism and Persianism are all elements that will prove important in our final analysis of what happened in Antiochan Commagene. However, there was yet another element that seems to have played an important role in Commagene: Roman power. It may therefore be instructive to broaden our set of Hellenistic parallels and to look at so-called client kings from the late Hellenistic world.¹⁸⁵ The examples of Herod the Great and Juba II have been selected not only because these kings very clearly invented traditions and dealt with local elements as well as Hellenism or Persianism, but also because, similar to Antiochos I, they had to function within a political framework that was more and more defined by the Romans. They also constitute a useful comparison because both of them initiated a truly dynastic project encompassing large-scale architectural interventions as well as the creation of new visual imagery.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ *Eckhardt 2017*.

¹⁸⁴ As demonstrated by Eckhardt (*Eckhardt 2017*), who also explains the particular nature of the Achaemenid revival of the Hasmoneans in relation to other such instances.

¹⁸⁵ For the system of Roman “client kings” see *Braund 1984*, and now *Facella/Kaizer 2010*, with all previous literature as well as a deconstruction of the (Romanocentric) term. Kropp (*Kropp 2013*) analyses Antiochan Commagene in the context of other Near Eastern “client kings” in the period as well, rightly paying a lot of attention to Herod the Great. He does not, however, deal with Juba II.

¹⁸⁶ Also strengthened, as far as Herod is concerned, by the parallelism suggested in *Hoepfner 1975*, 44 concerning the palace of the Commagenean kings in Samosata: “Was den Palast in Samosata

Herod the Great ruled Judea from 40 to 4 BC and is a well-known historical figure, not only because of his role in the Bible, but also because Josephus provides us with a full account – and value judgement – of his life.¹⁸⁷ Over the last decades more and more archaeological sources on Herodian Judea have become available. During his reign Herod built Hellenistic palaces as part of an extensive building programme in which he was personally involved.¹⁸⁸ Another part of this project was the Herodion, a monumental tomb located at a barren but highly visible location, which has already been discussed earlier in this chapter (3.1). Caesarea Maritima deserves special mention in this context – here Herod tried to create a Mediterranean maritime centre on a par with Alexandria and Antioch. The temple for Dea Roma and Augustus was the eye-catching landmark of what was meant to be a new Hellenistic centre.¹⁸⁹ As we have already seen in the discussion of the Herodion, comparisons to the Antiochan programme must remain rather general; partly due to the lack of published architectural decoration to supplement the architectural plans. However, recent studies have clearly shown that Herod legitimated his rule by presenting himself – in his building programme as well as in other contexts – as (1) the legitimate successor to the Hasmoneans and hence a Hellenistic king, (2) a loyal partner to the Romans and (3) king of the Jews.¹⁹⁰ He seems to have played out these three different roles in different places, stressing one aspect or another according to the context. His palaces celebrated the king as a Hellenistic sovereign; Caesarea Maritima had to become a Roman/Mediterranean *vile vitrine*;¹⁹¹ and

angeht, so werden Ausgrabungen vermutlich zeigen, daß er eine ähnliche Form und eine ähnliche Ausstattung hatte wie der Palast von Herodes dem Großen in Massada” (“With regard to the Palace in Samosata, excavations will probably show that the palace had a layout and facilities similar to the Palace of Herod the Great in Massada”). For such parallels, see now Kropp 2013.

¹⁸⁷ Already Schwentzel 2010 provides a direct comparison between Herod the Great and Antiochos I. Studies on Herod the Great and his power of images have proliferated over the last decade. Still fundamental is Schürer 1973. From recent literature I consulted Fittschen/Foerster 1996; Richardson 1996; Roller 1998; Lichtenberger 1999; Netzer 1999 and 2006; Japp 2000; Fisher 2003; Kokkinos 2007; Günther 2007; Wilker 2007; Jacobson/Kokkinos 2009; Günther 2009; and Kropp 2013. See most recently the splendid exhibition catalogue *Herod the Great: The King's final journey* from 2014.

¹⁸⁸ Useful summaries of the data in Netzer 1999 and Kropp 2013, 115–155.

¹⁸⁹ For the archaeology of Caesarea see Raban/Holum 1996 and the Caesarea papers published in the *Journal of Roman Archaeology* supplementary series, I (1992) and II (1999).

¹⁹⁰ Herod emerged from an Idumean background and apparently had no relation to the Judean Hasmoneans. This might explain his large need for ideology; cf. 3.6 and Schwentzel 2010. Remarkable is a speech reported by Josephus (15, 383–387) and supposedly held around 21 BC in which Herod talks about how “the Romans, who are, so to speak, the masters of the world, have become friends through my loyalty”; see Eckhardt 2017.

¹⁹¹ For this terminology, used by Ph. Leveau to characterise Iol Caesarea under Juba II, see below.

contemporary temple building in Jerusalem testified to his Jewish identity.¹⁹² Herod's kingship thus demonstrates a composite character – an inbetweenness – that can be easily understood from its social context. Descriptions such as megalomaniac – previously not unusual in descriptions of the Herodian project – are therefore ill-placed, as Lichtenberger has rightly pointed out.¹⁹³ It appears that with Herod the different elements were not combined into a single image, a new *Bild*, as we saw with the early Ptolemies. However, foreign elements or styles were not just copied or imported. Analysis of the architectural decoration in particular suggests that there existed something of a Herodian style – with original and innovative eclectic adaptations.¹⁹⁴

Juba II was born in 48 BC as the son of Juba I, king of Numidia. His father supported Pompey and committed suicide in 46 BC, after the battle at Thapsus in which Pompey and his men were defeated by Caesar. Juba II was taken to Rome, where he grew up in the imperial household. Cleopatra Selene, daughter of Mark Antony and Cleopatra VII, was married off to him when he was a young man, and in 23 BC Octavian made him *rex sociusque et amicus* of the province of Mauretania.¹⁹⁵ Clearly Juba II was faced with the problem of legitimating his power there – he came from a centuries-old Numidian dynasty and was now supposed to rule Mauretania.¹⁹⁶ He appears to have done so in a threefold way. Firstly – and logically – he underlined his relationship with Augustus, the new ruler of the Mediterranean. Iol was renamed Iol Caesarea and portraits of Juba II were clearly modelled on those of Augustus¹⁹⁷ – the only real difference

¹⁹² I do not intend to suggest a strict dichotomy: at Caesarea there was, for example, a Herodian palace. On these questions more in detail, cf. *Weber 2008*, as well as *Kropp 2013*, 344–357.

¹⁹³ *Lichtenberger 1999*.

¹⁹⁴ Several essays in *Fittschen/Foerster 1996* try to compare Herodian material culture with examples from elsewhere in the Mediterranean. For some of the evidence see the series *Hasmonean and Herodian palaces at Jericho*, especially the recent volume (IV) – *Rozenberg 2008* – that shows the use, in Jericho, of the Second Pompeian style that was popular all across the Mediterranean and has eclecticism as one of its main characteristics (see 4.3). For these questions, see now also *Kropp 2013* and the exhibition catalogue mentioned in n.187.

¹⁹⁵ This fascinating biography, combined with the growing archaeological record of Iol Caesarea, has given rise to an extensive recent bibliography. Still important are *Fittschen 1974*; the exhibition catalogue *Die Numider* (1979); and *Leveau 1984*. From recent literature I consulted *Coltelloni-Trannoy 1997* with the review in *Gnomon* 72 (2000), 422–425; *Roller 2003*; the exhibition catalogue *Algérie Antique* (2003); and *Landwehr 1993, 2000 and 2007a*.

¹⁹⁶ In all aspects, the Numidian kings were part of the pan-Mediterranean culture of the Hellenistic era; Massinissa, who ruled from 203 to 148 BC, played a particularly important role in this process. See *Coarelli/Thébert 1988* and the exhibition catalogue *Algérie Antique* (2003), 22–34.

¹⁹⁷ See *Schumacher (Schumacher 2008, 141–160)*.

being the fact that Juba II was displayed with the royal diadem. This royal diadem was a clear reference to the tradition of Hellenistic kingship wherein he wanted to be placed: the second strand of legitimation.¹⁹⁸ The third was his claim on Herakles as his mythical forebear: a dynastic legitimation par excellence for Hellenistic rulers. It is interesting to note that in comparison to the Ptolemies, the Hasmoneans or Herod the Great it appears that Juba II did not make the indigenous past – invented or not – part of his public identity.¹⁹⁹ The portraits of Juba I that have been preserved show the diadem to demonstrate his status as Hellenistic king, but they have striking indigenous African traits as well, such as the portrayal of the hair.²⁰⁰ With Juba II such local associations are lacking, at least in portraiture.

Juba II launched an impressive building programme that turned Iol Caesarea into a *ville vitrine* – a kind of miniature Rome.²⁰¹ The statues that have been preserved from the city fit the Mediterranean repertoire of the period. There are few imports; probably many of them were manufactured in Iol Caesarea itself. There are no signs of the existence of something like a composite style with eclectic adaptations. Outside Caesarea an impressive tumulus with Ionian façade has been preserved. It probably dates from the period of Juba II and was meant to serve as a dynastic tomb.²⁰² Here we do seem to witness the eclectic contamination of different styles so typical of many examples discussed above – it therefore comes as no surprise that scholars have struggled to make sense of it stylistically.²⁰³

¹⁹⁸ Based on the specific form of the diadem, it has been suggested that Juba II may have particularly sought a connection with the Ptolemies.

¹⁹⁹ See most recently *Landwehr 2007b*. Note that one should be careful with drawing final conclusions due to the limited amount of evidence. We also know, for instance, that Juba II wrote a treatise called *Libyca*, something that is at least suggestive of an interest in his indigenous past.

²⁰⁰ For an example from coinage with the coin showing inscriptions in Latin and Punic, see *Alexandropoulos 2000*, 401, no. 29.

²⁰¹ In general still see *Leveau 1984*, which coined this term. Note that the chronology of the building programme is disputed. Only the theatre can be dated within the period of Juba II. Most scholars, however, seem to agree on the fact that large parts of the building programme were designed under Juba II. On the chronology of this period as established by the Forum excavations see *Potter 1995*, 23–32.

²⁰² Generally known under the name *tombeau de la Chrétienne* (which it is not) it has a diameter of 61 metres and is almost 33 metres high. Cf. the exhibition catalogue *Algérie Antique* (2003), 33, 293, and, also in general, *Coarelli/Thébert 1988*.

²⁰³ S. Gsell (quoted in *Algérie Antique* (2003), 293) characterised it as “construction de type indigène, il est couvert d’une chemise grecque” (“being a construction of the indigenous type, it is covered by a Greek dress”), while the fundamental study on the architecture (and its many restorations), *Christofle 1951*, left it at stating that all kinds of influences were visible. The latter conclusion prompted a keen observation by H. Hoffmann, who, in his review of the book in *AJA*

To summarise: it appears that Juba II presented himself as an independent Hellenistic king – which in every respect he was not – while at the same time displaying great loyalty to Augustus and Rome. This was apparently not perceived as an inconsistency at the time. As far as we can tell, references to local characteristics were less prominent.²⁰⁴ After Actium, these concepts were apparently less suited to capitalise upon, at least in this particular case. But it may also have had something to do with the (more limited) possibilities of the (Punic, Numidian, Mauretanian or Libyan) concept and its expression, as an “ethnic style”, in material culture in the Augustan era. Be that as it may: in Mauretania Juba II could settle with Hellenism and Augustus.

3.5 Structuring Identity

In his important handbook on Hellenistic sculpture, Smith characterised the Antiochan *Bildprogramm* as follows:

The nature and expression of Antiochos’ theocratic pretensions are unique in this period, and perhaps reveal serious delusions of the mind . . . The synthetic style of the sculptures has a certain hollowness that well expresses Antiochos’ dynastic vision. The monuments of Kommagene were probably the atypical products of a troubled time and a troubled mind.²⁰⁵

In all respects, however, this chapter has made a very different argument. Neither Antiochos’ theocratic and dynastic pretensions, nor the way he materialised these ideas by means of the invention of a new image, are unique or atypical for the period. Quite the contrary: not only was *what* Antiochos did part of the general picture of Hellenistic kingship in the period, but so was *how* he did it – as the many parallels drawn in this chapter have already shown and as the subsequent chapter will further illustrate.

The question remains as to *why* Antiochos I developed this programme. As we have seen, the answer cannot simply be that he designed a Greek-Persian/Iranian programme because Kommagene is a Greek-Persian/Iranian province with Greek-Persian/Iranian inhabitants. We know too little about the ethnic and cultural make-up of Kommagene in the period of Antiochos I to take this as our point of departure for further analysis. Moreover, examples of other dynastic projects carried out in the

62 (1958), 130–131, wrote: “It is not enough to state in the introduction that we find Egypt, Africa and Hellas combined in the architecture of this building and let matters go at that.”

²⁰⁴ While Persianism is absent altogether. ²⁰⁵ Smith 1991, 227–228.

Mediterranean and Near East during roughly the same period have demonstrated that various manipulations took place; that dynastic identity was often invented or constructed;²⁰⁶ and that the application of “ethnic styles” in fact often had socio-cultural meanings.

Inventing traditions played an important part in all this. We have seen Macedonian generals posing as the descendants of Egyptian pharaohs and Herod presenting himself as a Hasmonean. And with those (invented) traditions came a dynastic *Bildprogramm* with a lot of material culture to back up, show and disseminate those claims. Ethnic references within those projects are therefore more likely to be strategic, socio-political choices than historical truths – and this is likely to be true not only for dynastic projects. The examples of Sarapis and Isis have clearly demonstrated that composite images that reflect a “double identity” have no direct relation to (those) ethnic groups in society. Of course, Sarapis and Isis have something to do with both Egypt and Greece. However, the composite image of the gods is a matter of choice; not the logical and inevitable outcome of a historical process in which two ethnic groups meet and merge. Also an ethnic Syrian living in Alexandria could present himself, through material culture, as Greek and Egyptian at the same time, as has been argued. The case of the Hasmoneans underlined this, by showing that Hellenisation and Hellenism are quite different concepts. This difference will be elaborated upon in [Chapter 4](#), in which it is argued that what we see in Commagene is Hellenism rather than Hellenisation. Hasmonean identity building looks remarkably similar to identity building in Antiochan Commagene, not only because of the historical circumstances, but also because of the active role material culture plays in this process. The sections on Herod the Great and Juba II suggested that so-called Roman client kings had a lot of space to play out a set of alternative identities as well. They had local formats at their disposal; there was Hellenism and Persianism; and from the period of Augustus onwards there now also was a Roman format to emulate – as illustrated by the temple for Dea Roma at Caesarea Maritima, or the Augustan portraits of Juba II. The coming of Rome in the late Hellenistic East therefore seems not to have restricted or entailed the range of identity-possibilities at all. On the contrary: through Rome the Hellenistic *koine* only widened – at least until the period of the Augustan cultural revolution.

²⁰⁶ Kropp ([Kropp 2013](#), 357) characterises this as follows: “what is at stake here is . . . versatility in adapting and rechanneling local discourses while developing . . . visual languages to manifest central authority.”

The main conclusion of this chapter, thus far, is therefore that we should not regard the material culture of Antiochan Commagene as an ethnic or cultural “index” of its population or royal house, but rather as a dynastic Hellenistic project that had many (structural) parallels; not as the logical and linear outcome of a historical process in which ethnic and cultural identities from East and West met, but as a set of specific choices made for specific reasons.²⁰⁷ These choices were made because of a variety of factors, in which the (partly invented) Achaemenid and Seleucid past, the Hellenistic present and the anticipated future as a semi-independent client kingdom all played a role.²⁰⁸

The importance of this point of view for the interpretation of Commagenean archaeology will become clearer when some archaeological interpretations are discussed in detail in the final section of this chapter (3.7), but may already be illustrated by some general observations on the meaning of the Antiochan visual language. The following examples summarise the *communis opinio* and illustrate an approach that is the opposite of the one suggested here:

The monuments and inscriptions of King Antiochos I of Commagene are a testimony to the *blending* of elements of Oriental and Hellenistic culture on the grounds of Commagene.²⁰⁹

The sculptures which have been found illustrate Commagene’s *intermediary position* between the Hellenistic and Iranian-Parthian worlds.²¹⁰

Greek was the common language spoken in the Eastern Mediterranean at this time; hence the inscriptions allow us *valuable insights into all areas of ancient life* during the late Hellenistic period.²¹¹

The *mixture* of Iranian and Greek elements in both *the blood* and the names of these rulers was also reflected in their monumental art.²¹²

The *fusion process* between Greek and Persian elements which was expressed in cultic inscriptions mainly through the syncretic naming of paternal gods from

²⁰⁷ As already rightly emphasised in Smith 1988a, 103.

²⁰⁸ For the importance of such a perspective for the history of the ancient Mediterranean and Near East more in general, see Gardner/Osterloh 2008 and Gabba 2008.

²⁰⁹ Krüger 1937, 9: “Die Denkmäler und Inschriften des Königs Antiochos I. von Kommagene sind Zeugen des *Zusammenfließens* orientalischer und hellenistischer Kulturelemente auf dem Boden von Kommagene.”

²¹⁰ Dörner/Goell 1963, 302 (on Arsameia ad Nymphaeum): “Die kommagenische *Mittlerstellung* zwischen der hellenistischen und der iranisch-parthischen Welt zeigen die wieder aufgefundenen Skulpturen.”

²¹¹ Dörner 1987, 8: “Griechisch war zur damaligen Zeit die allgemeine Verkehrssprache im gesamten östlichen Mittelmeerraum, so daß uns die Inschriften wertvolle *Einblicke in sämtliche Bereiche des antiken Lebens* zu späthellenistischer Zeit erlauben.”

²¹² Pollitt 1986, 274–275.

Persia and Macedonia (Zeus-Oromasdes, Apollon Mithras and Herakles Artagnes) reached its strongest expression in the cult reliefs.²¹³

Two other kingdoms, Cappadocia and Commagene, were ruled by the descendants of former Persian satraps . . . and remained as *pockets of Iranian culture* within the Roman empire.²¹⁴

The sculpture programme typical of the sanctuaries of Commagene are one step . . . in a long *process of Hellenisation* in the country.²¹⁵

None of the Hellenistic kingdoms illustrates better than Commagene on the Euphrates, the role of Asia Minor as a bridge country, and as a *mediator between Orient and Occident*.²¹⁶

The scholars quoted above base their arguments on ideas like *Zusammenfließen* (“blending”), *Mittlerstellung* (“intermediary position”), *Einblicke in sämtliche Bereiche des antiken Lebens* (“insights into all areas of life”), *mixture of Iranian and Greek elements in the blood*, *Verschmelzungsprozeß* (“fusion process”), *pockets of Iranian culture*, *Hellenisierungsprozesses* (“the process of Hellenisation”) or *Vermittlerin zwischen Orient und Okzident* (“mediator between Orient and Occident”).

All of them thus understand Antiochan Commagene and its material culture as an ethnic or cultural “index” of its population or royal dynasty; as the outcome of an acculturation process in which ethnic identities from East and West have merged. However, we are largely ignorant of these processes in the social context. Moreover, as Antiochan material culture was an eclectically composed dynastic image typical of Hellenistic kingship, we cannot automatically make these assumptions. What direction should we then take?

To try to answer this question we must turn, as this chapter has argued, to Hellenistic kingship in the first place.²¹⁷ In the dynastic self-presentation of the Hellenistic kings and their court, “ethnic styles” apparently had

²¹³ Wagner 1987, 179: “Der griechisch-persische *Verschmelzungsprozeß*, der in den Kultinschriften vor allem in der synkretistischen Benennung der ‘väterlichen Götter aus Persien und Makedonien’ (Zeus Oromasdes, Apollon Mithras und Herakles Artagnes) deutlich wird, findet seinen auffälligsten Ausdruck in den Kultreliefs.”

²¹⁴ Ball 2000, 31. Note also page 435 where Ball characterises Commagene as a “neo-Persian kingdom.”

²¹⁵ Jacobs/Röllinger 2005, 151: “Die Skulpturenausstattung der kommagenischen Heiligtümer war ein Schritt . . . innerhalb eines länger währenden *Hellenisierungsprozesses im Lande*.”

²¹⁶ Schwertheim 2005, 77: “Keine der hellenistischen Königreiche verdeutlicht so gut die Rolle Kleinasiens als Brückenland und als *Vermittlerin zwischen Orient und Okzident* wie das am Euphrat gelegene Kommagene.” See for this quote also the conclusion to 2.4.

²¹⁷ Cf. Ma 2003a, 174–178, which remarks on the Seleucids: “It’s ideology, not Empire.” Literature on Hellenistic kingship includes Bilde et al. 1990; Bertrand 1990; Bilde et al. 1996; Bringmann 1993, 7–24; Koenen 1993; Schwarzer 1999; and the work by B. Vergilio, most notably Vergilio 2003.

(sometimes) lost their ethnic background altogether and had come to represent (very) different social categories and associations. This royal symbolism seems to have functioned on different levels.²¹⁸ Of course it had a meaning for and relation to the area it functioned in, but simultaneously it was part of a Mediterranean and Near Eastern-wide, global Hellenistic trend. This chapter has argued for an understanding of the Antiochan project against the background of a symbolism that was understood throughout Hellenistic Eurasia. Antiochos I adopted and invented cultural forms of self-representation for specific audiences. The audience was not necessarily the inhabitants of his kingdom primarily; it is equally likely that the intended audience consisted of his dynastic Hellenistic peers.²¹⁹ In doing so, Antiochos I was part of – and added to – a Hellenistic symbolism that was meant to appeal to the subjects in his kingdom and to audiences in the *oikumene* at large.²²⁰

Before reconstructing the reasons behind the Antiochan programme, on both levels, in the conclusion to this chapter, it is useful to first look more in detail at how Antiochos I positioned himself and what exactly his self-

A recent overview is provided in *Günther/Plischke 2011*. For an introduction to the individual dynasties, see part II of *Erschine 2003*. A recent, important book is *Strootman 2014*, an attempt to come to an integrated understanding of court culture, ceremonial and ideology in Hellenistic Greece, Egypt and the Near East; see *Strootman 2013b* for a summary of the argument.

²¹⁸ As *Strootman (Strootman 2007, 347)* concluded: “The Hellenistic kingdoms were empires, loosely uniting multifarious peoples and societies. This was notably the case in the Seleucid Empire, but also the Ptolemies and even the Antigonids had to reckon with diverse ethnic, cultural and political entities within their respective spheres of influence. In neither of these kingdoms kings could easily appeal to a common set of social values endorsed by all the subjects. Instead, the symbols of power were adjusted to circumstances. Put into a simple scheme, two main forms of royal symbolism can be discerned, a local and a central one. First, kingdoms adopted and reformed culturally specific forms of monarchic representation for specific audiences . . . Second, the kingdoms gradually developed a central, all-embracing symbolism which would equally appeal to subjects of different nationalities.” See also *Strootman 2011* for the example of the Seleucid imperial court under Antiochos the Great.

²¹⁹ Cf. *Lehmle 2005*, 189–209, which draws a similar conclusion regarding the *Kulturpolitik* of Hiero II of Syracuse, and *Bertrand 1990*, 108, which notes on the communication between the Hellenistic kings in general: “Le dialogue y devenait tout à fait nécessaire” (“The dialogue was becoming rather necessary”).

²²⁰ The conclusion in *Berns 2003* – as formulated in the introduction on p. 9 – on the function of *Memorialbauten* in the second and first centuries BC in Asia Minor, fits well into the general idea of simultaneous local and pan-Hellenistic representation: “Architektonisch anspruchsvolle Memorialbauten errichtete man . . . vereinzelt an landschaftlich markante Stellen wie auch im Zentrum der Städte. Ihre Gestaltung war vor allem von zwei immer wiederkehrenden Leitmotiven geprägt: der gegenseitigen Konkurrenz und der Distanzierung gegenüber dem Betrachter” (“Architecturally refined memorials were built . . . sometimes in striking scenic settings as well as in the centre of the cities. Their design was influenced primarily by two recurring *leitmotifs*: mutual competition and the distancing vis-à-vis the beholder”).

presentation looked like. Who were his models? What kind of concepts did he adopt and reform? And why?

3.5.1 Looking back: From Mausollos to the Seleucid Kings

No scholar studying Nemrud Dağ has failed to notice the structural similarities with the Mausolleion at Halikarnassos, which was built circa three centuries earlier. Hoepfner has even suggested that it was a direct inspiration.²²¹ Did Antiochos I try to establish this link on purpose and did he use the famous Carian king as a model?²²²

The Mausolleion at Halikarnassos was built circa 350 BC as part of a larger dynastic project.²²³ The combination of a relatively large amount of historical, literary and archaeological sources on this monument makes it one of the most discussed examples of so-called Greco-Oriental material culture.²²⁴ In structural terms, the Mausolleion and Nemrud Dağ have a lot in common. Both are temple-tombs that were intended to serve as a *heroön*. Both displayed monumental statues of their builder amid the gods. Both had ancestor galleries to legitimate dynastic rule and to add to

²²¹ Hoepfner/Schwandner 1994, 226 and Hoepfner 2002, 419: “Die sehr viel später am Grabmal des Königs Antiochos von Kommagene aufgestellten Reliefs mit Ahnenbildern . . . sind zweifellos dem Mausoleum ebenso abgeschaut wie das dort gleichfalls strapazierte Thema der Apotheose des Königs Antiochos” (“The ancestral reliefs which had been placed at the tomb of King Antiochus of Commagene at a much later point . . . were undoubtedly inspired by the mausoleum; this also applies to the theme of the apotheosis of King Antiochos which was stressed there equally extensively”).

²²² On the use of the past in Hellenistic contexts in general see Scheer 2003; several contributions to Gruen 2005a; Briant 2009; and recently Howe 2013. For a material culture perspective, see Kousser 2005.

²²³ Mausollos’ palace was also part of the building project; however, we know nothing with certainty about the style in which it was executed, or the cultural character (Greek, Persian, Carian) of the elements used; cf. Strootman 2007, 58–59 and Hoepfner 2013, 56–58.

²²⁴ Its supposed meaning was summarised by Hoepfner (Hoepfner 2002, 420) as follows: “Die Botschaft des Mausoleums läßt sich in zwei Sätzen zusammenfassen: der karische König ist ein Bewunderer und Förderer griechischer Kunst und Kultur. Mit feiner Säulenarchitektur und einem großen Programm für Reliefs und Statuen sollte jeder Betrachter bewundernd erkennen, daß er aufgrund seiner Taten und seiner vornehmen Abstammung in den Kreis der olympischen Götter aufgenommen wurde” (“The message of the mausoleum can be summed up in two sentences: the Carian King was an admirer and promoter of Greek art and culture. Through the architecture of fine columns with a large programme of reliefs and statues each viewer should recognise with admiration that [the Carian King] due to his deeds and his noble descent was accepted into the circle of the Olympian gods”). Earlier literature (with bibliography) includes: Hornblower 1982; Waywell 1978; and Cook 2005. The archaeological work on the mausoleum by Jeppesen (Jeppesen 1981–2002) is fundamental; note however that his reconstructions of the monument are not undisputed. The series itself is still running. In a small monograph from 2013, Hoepfner has now usefully summarised his conclusions on the history, reconstruction and meaning of the monument.

the personal charisma of the king. Both had lions prominently displayed as royal animals. Both had a hidden tomb chamber. Both were newly designed dynastic building projects.²²⁵ And both were looking back: where we perhaps should speak of a “Persian Renaissance” with Nemrud Dağ (see 4.3), the Mausolleion is often characterised as “Ionian Renaissance.” What about the character and function of the eclectic visual language in the Mausolleion? Vitruvius and Pliny – both Roman sources dating from a much later period – mention that the Mausolleion would have been decorated by four Greek sculptors. The decoration of the sculptures and friezes is indeed distinctly Greek, as are the Ionian columns. Persian elements can be distinguished in details of clothing: some of the ancestors and/or relatives were displayed as Persian, as were the servants holding the horses placed at the lower end of the pyramid. The immense sockle, however, is probably reminiscent of older – Lycian and Carian – funerary monuments from the region itself.²²⁶ The stepped pyramid, lastly, a most un-Greek architectural element, is clearly reminiscent, Hoepfner argues, of older, Carian architecture.²²⁷ It can therefore be concluded that the Mausolleion demonstrates the juxtaposition of discrete elements from different cultures within a single monument, and that the outcome, as such, is unique. The principles behind all this, however, are often said to be part of a broader development, dated roughly to the period 430–330 BC, when “formal eastern styles” were combined with the “naturalistic, Greek ‘Classical’ style,”²²⁸ especially in dynastic self-presentation. The earliest example of this development can be seen in Xanthos – the Nereid monument – and there is a similar monument at Trysa.²²⁹

²²⁵ The original capital of Caria was Mylasa; with the building of Halikarnassos, Mausollos tried to create a new dynastic centre. Halikarnassos was designed as the new centre for Caria and the Hekatomnid dynasty, focused on the temple-tomb of Mausollos. Cf. Hoepfner/Schwandner 1994, 226–234 and Hoepfner 2013, 33–69. In a similar vein Antiochos I created a network of new dynastic centres in Commagene, of which his temple-tomb at Nemrud Dağ was the focus.

²²⁶ Hoepfner 2002, 418.

²²⁷ Hoepfner 2013, 117: “Wir gehen also nicht fehl, wenn wir die Stufenpyramide am Maussoleion für das deutliche Zeichen der ehrwürdigen karischen Kultur halten” (“We can’t go wrong, if we attribute the stepped pyramid at the Mausoleum to the distinct character of the venerable Carian culture”).

²²⁸ To use the definition (and dating) in Colledge 1987.

²²⁹ Both monuments are discussed in the recent overview by Jenkins (Jenkins 2006), index sv. with all previous literature. It seems that this “Greco-Persian” style was taken up outside monumental contexts as well, as is demonstrated by the spread of a genre of reliefs executed in this particular way, showing banquet and hunting scenes, over north-west Anatolia (Colledge 1987, 137). In his study of Greek and Persian elements in Lycia, Jacobs (Jacobs 1987) draws some important conclusions on the occurrence and meaning of these elements. He underlined that Persian monumental art should be seen as *Hofkunst* (“court art”) that was not widely

The use of the concepts “Greek” and “Persian” in this way continued in the Hellenistic period, as is illustrated, for instance, by the kings of Pergamon.²³⁰ While it looks Greek, the Great Altar from around 160 BC had clear (so-called) Asian traits as well – and is said in that respect to resemble the Mausolleion and the Lycian monuments discussed above.²³¹ The Attalids were constantly engaged in constructing a public image to show and legitimise their power: cultivating an international, pan-Hellenistic image played an important role herein.²³²

In the Persian and Hellenistic periods therefore, to conclude this brief overview, a dynastic style with Greek as well as Persian elements served to impress. It would have impressed the wider Hellenistic world through its suggestion of dynastic legitimation as well as novelty, modernity and cultural know-how, while the local public would have been impressed by the unique amalgamation of so many different foreign elements.²³³ Antiochos I seems to have capitalised on this tradition.

The Seleucid tradition was apparently of great importance to Antiochos I as well. This can be conjectured from the fact that the kings of the Antiochan dynasty were all called Mithridates or Antiochos, like the

distributed outside residential contexts such as Persepolis and Susa. It was, therefore, not readily available to be copied and disseminated. In minor arts, however, Persian elements did play an important role.

²³⁰ On the self-presentation of the Attalids *Schalles 1985* remains fundamental, now with *Schwarzer 1999*; *Ridgway 2000*; *Queyrel 2003*; and *Stewart 2005*. For an overview, see *Kosmetatou 2003*; interesting remarks and ideas in *Kuttner 2005*.

²³¹ Kuttner (*Kuttner 2005*, 159) described this as a double stemma, and remarked that “Asianism . . . frequently involved archaism, its models pointing to ages as well as kings.” Encompassing on the monument is now the study *Queyrel 2005*.

²³² Cf. *Gruen 2001*, 17: “The Attalids of Pergamon . . . mastered the art of cultivating an international image. They needed to.”

²³³ In his general discussion of *Memorialbauten* in the second and first centuries BC, Berns (*Berns 2003*, 23–24) concludes: “Den Herrschern in den von starken regionalen Traditionen bestimmten Gebieten ging es offenbar darum, mit einem griechisch geprägten Bauwerk ihre Teilhabe an bestimmten kulturellen Vorstellungen überregional unter Beweis zu stellen. Nur so läßt sich erklären, daß man beim Nereidenmonument oder dem Heroon in Limyra Elemente athenischer Gebäude kopierte, die kaum ein Lykier gekannt haben kann. Die späthellenistischen Bürger zielten hingegen darauf ab, ihre Stellung innerhalb der Polis zu bestimmen. Der mit der Vereinigung einer Vielzahl von Architekturelementen geschaffene Prunk diente ihnen zur Unterstreichung ihrer Überlegenheit gegenüber den Mitbürgern” (“The rulers of areas defined by strong local traditions were apparently keen to deploy Greek-influenced architecture to demonstrate their participation in certain cultural ideas beyond their regional boundaries. This explains why elements of Athenian buildings, which hardly any Lycians could have known, found their way into the Nereid monument or the *heroön* in Limyra. In contrast, late Hellenistic citizens aimed to determine their position within the polis. The splendour which was created through a combination of a variety of architectural elements served to underline their superiority over their fellow citizens”).

majority of Seleucid kings. Moreover, Antiochos I claimed a dynastic connection to the Seleucid house through his father Mithridates I Kallinikos, who – according to the inscriptions made under Antiochos I himself at least – married Laodike, a daughter of the Seleucid king Antiochos VIII Grypos (125–96 BC).²³⁴

The Seleucid Empire was a conglomerate of many different peoples and cultures that happened to be under Seleucid rule at a given time. Therefore, “There was no way of describing the empire apart from the person of its ruler.”²³⁵ The image of this ruler – and of the values and identities represented by the ruler – was therefore of the utmost importance.²³⁶ For the Seleucids, one of the main forms of legitimation was military success. The Persian past of the region does not seem to have played a role of any importance in their legitimation.²³⁷ Apollo and Zeus were venerated as their dynastic gods; Seleukos I Nikator (312–281 BC) was hailed as the son of Apollo. Antiochos III the Great (223–187 BC) created a divine cult for himself and his wife Laodike, and tried to implement it in his kingdom.²³⁸ Therefore, it was only from around this period so it seems, probably circa 200 BC, that the Seleucids changed from the Antigonid model of having almost no dynastic cult, to the Ptolemaic model of having a fully developed dynastic cult.²³⁹ It is interesting to note that they did not choose to include Alexander the Great among the ancestors of the dynasty; after more than a century of Seleucid rule this form of legitimation was apparently no longer deemed necessary.²⁴⁰ There is evidence to suggest that Antiochos IV Epiphanes (175–164 BC) tried to bind his disintegrating

²³⁴ Cf. Ehling 2008, 230 and Strootman 2016. For dynastic legitimation through mothers in general during this period, see Flower 2002 and Hekster 2015, Chapter 3.

²³⁵ After Austin 2003, 122. Other recent publications on the Seleucid Empire that deal (more or less extensively) with questions on cultural character include: Kuhrt/Sherwin-White 1993; Kuhrt 1996; Ma 2003a; Aperghis 2004; Capdetrey 2007; Strootman 2007; Ehling 2008; Erickson/Ramsey 2011; and Strootman 2013c.

²³⁶ The most recent detailed account on the Seleucid ruler cult is Van Nuffelen 2004. Van Nuffelen rightly stresses that we know little about the cult itself, and are relatively better informed about the honours bestowed on them in the cities of their Empire. For the archaeological material, see Fleischer 1991. In a recent article, Hoover (Hoover 2011) maintains that the iconography of Seleukos I was intended to be “multicultural”; that is: targeted towards Babylonian and Iranian religious ideals as well as to Greek ones.

²³⁷ On this important question much can be found in various contributions to Strootman/Versluys 2017.

²³⁸ See Strootman 2011.

²³⁹ For this chronology, see Van Nuffelen 2004, which argues that only from approximately 200 BC onwards the concept of the ancestors comes to play an important role, while it is also from that period onwards that a high priest for the king as well as a high priestess for his wife Laodike were installed.

²⁴⁰ Van Nuffelen 2004, 293.

empire together by propagating a new cult of Zeus.²⁴¹ The Seleucids largely seem to have followed an Achaemenid (so-called) supra-national approach in ruling their territory. They accepted that local regions were relatively independent, and to a large extent followed their own traditions. As with the Ptolemies, therefore, kingship was recast in the local idiom: in Babylon, Antiochos I Soter (281–261 BC) and other Seleucid kings presented themselves as Babylonian monarchs. On the basis of this and other evidence, the view that the Seleucids were champions of the Greek West in an Oriental context has been shown to be incorrect.²⁴² It was their (cultural) membership of the wider Hellenistic world that led to their obvious use of Greek elements. Coinage, for example, was purely Greek in all respects – and remained so in the Eastern context wherein it functioned. That said, however, it is striking that the king and his small circle of *philoi* seem to have remained Macedonian and Greek in an ethnic sense for a long time as well. With the Seleucids, therefore, different meanings of Greek intermingled. Greek could mean (1) ethnic Greek from Greece, (2) ethnic Greek as indication of a diaspora community and (3) Greek as a specific cultural concept.²⁴³ Seleucid rule had a large impact on the northern Euphrates landscape of which Commagene was a part. Successive Seleucid kings built cities in the area of which Antiochia – which rapidly developed to become a large centre and eventually a metropolis – and the twin cities Apameia and Seleukeia would have been the most significant for Commagene. With his dynastic image, Antiochos I wanted to show that he was a legitimate heir to the Seleucids, whom he therefore presented as his predecessors. Stating that his ancestry went back to Alexander the Great seems not to have been intended to indicate that he was Macedonian or Greek in the first place, but rather to show that he was Seleucid, as is perfectly clear from the remainder of the genealogy. Antiochos I was thus not so much looking for a Greek identity in ethnic terms, so it seems, but for a Seleucid identity. The fact that the Seleucid king Antiochos III the Great, in circa 200 BC, did *not* include Alexander the Great in his (invented) ancestry seems to indicate that Antiochos I was not an evident successor to the Seleucids at all. He needed his invented tradition to be as strong as possible, and therefore included Alexander. This picture fits well into the political and social context of the first century BC: after the fall of the Seleucids, dynastic legitimisation in the eastern Mediterranean and the

²⁴¹ Hoepfner (*Hoepfner* 1983, 60) sees this as a kind of synthesis of East and West. Cf. now Mittag 2006 with a different emphasis. In general for this period: Ehling 2008.

²⁴² Strootman 2013c. ²⁴³ For such a distinction in more general terms, see Hall 1990.

Near East was often all about claiming to be the real successor to the Seleucids and, hence, the rightful King of Kings.²⁴⁴ The late Hellenistic Pontic kings, for example, seem to have used exactly the same strategy as Antiochos I.²⁴⁵ In their case, the names of the monarchs were attached to Mithras – and hence suggestive of and claiming a Persian background – while they emphasised a Macedonian ancestry at the same time in order to present themselves as successors to Alexander the Great and the Seleucid dynasty. The self-presentation of the Bithynian kings looks remarkably similar in these aspects as well.²⁴⁶

3.5.2 Looking Forward: A Friend of the Romans?

The section above has briefly indicated how references to the past were crucial to the Antiochan project – underlining once more how it should be understood as dynastic symbolism as part of much wider Hellenistic developments. But besides looking back, Antiochos I also had to look forward. The (political) situation he was in after the Roman interventions by Pompey can be expected to have triggered a response in terms of self-presentation; as was the case with “client kings” like Herod the Great and Juba II (see 3.4). As discussed above, both of these rulers made Rome a part of their set of (public) identities – most probably in order to show their loyalty and their understanding of the new political situation. Within the Antiochan project, however, the only clear Roman reference seems to be the king’s self-declared qualification as *philorhomaïos*. How should we understand this?

The term *philorhomaïos* was, together with its counterpart *philhellen*, used more frequently in the Hellenistic east in this period.²⁴⁷ *Philhellen* – in the sense of “admirer of things Greek” – first occurs with Herodotos to characterise the Egyptian pharaoh Amasis. From the middle of the second century BC it can be seen used in their titulature by many Hellenistic kings; for instance, by the Parthian king Mithridates I in 141 BC after his victory over Babylonia. Examples from the first century BC include the Nabatean king Aretas III (between 84 and 71 BC) and, in the same period, Tigranes of Armenia. *Philorhomaïos* can only be seen used in the late Hellenistic period and therefore seems to have developed as a counterpart to the already existing and functioning

²⁴⁴ See Wiesehöfer 1996 and Strootman 2010. ²⁴⁵ Cf. Michels 2008 and Højte 2009.

²⁴⁶ See Hannestad 1996 and now Michels 2008.

²⁴⁷ Fundamental is Ferrary 1988, 497–504. Lastly on this question Facella 2005a and Facella 2010, 184–191 with all previous literature.

term *philhellen*. Several kings in the region (shortly) before and at the time of Antiochos I call themselves *philorhomaioi*: for instance, Ariobarzanes of Cappadocia who ruled between 96 and 63 BC. The term is (almost) never found used in mundane texts or inscriptions, but always in the context of dynastic self-stylisation. Smith has put forward the suggestion that monarchs using the epitheton also (literally) showed their loyalty to Rome by using a Roman Republican “veristic” style in their portraiture, and he consequently distinguishes a special group of *philorhomaioi* in Hellenistic sculpture.²⁴⁸ This hypothesis, however, has been criticised because the so-called veristic style was, in fact, not at all typically Roman.²⁴⁹ It seems most likely, therefore, that both terms are used to claim membership to the (wider) Hellenistic world and the club of Hellenistic kings. Up to a certain point *philhellen* still sufficed, but in the social and political context of the first century BC *philorhomaioi* was added to express a similar thing. Antiochos I called himself *philorhomaioi* to stress his status as a Hellenistic king and to keep up with the Hellenistic dynasts around him.²⁵⁰ Of course this had something to do with Roman power, but rather more indirectly.

How then to explain the absence of any direct sign of (loyalty to) Rome? Antiochan Commagene is often defined, in time, as being late Hellenistic – also in this study. The inconvenience of this terminology – indeed no terminology is without its problems – was recently emphasised by J.M. Dentzer, with regard to Syria. In his view, the situation in this area can hardly be called Hellenistic any more after Pompey’s interventions, while the period commonly described as “provincial Roman” had not really begun. For the Hauran he therefore distinguished a phase he called “préprovinciale” (“pre-provincial”) – adding how this period in particular saw the emergence of new and original forms and styles of material culture.²⁵¹ Antiochan Commagene was, in fact, pre-provincial as well,

²⁴⁸ Smith 1988a, 102–106, followed by Facella 2005a, 93–94. The term “veristic” is meant to indicate the life-like and often even over-realistic way of portrayal characterising Roman Republican portraits; see Croz 2002, 238–250 for definitions, bibliography and problems of the concept.

²⁴⁹ See Croz 2002 with earlier bibliography and the remarks in 1.1.

²⁵⁰ As already demonstrated in Ferrary 1988, 501 n. 19: “Cette titulature, avec l’ordre significatif des épithètes, n’implique pas un équilibre entre philoromanisme et philhellénisme, mais se rattache à un thème de propagande faisant du philoromanisme des rois le nouveau fondement de leur philhellénisme” (“This titulature, with its significant order of the epithets, does not imply a balance between philoromanism and philhellenism, but is related to a propaganda theme that makes these kings’ philoromanism the new foundation for their philhellenism”).

²⁵¹ Dentzer 2003: “Durant cette phase ont été créés nombre de vestiges d’une réelle originalité, par rapport aux séries gréco-romaines, dans le domaine de l’architecture et de la sculpture, mais

and, in some respects, thinking of it in this way helps us to understand it better.²⁵² The term pre-provincial implies that local dynasts and elites still had a great deal of freedom in building their identity in cultural terms. They did this, as has been illustrated, through inventing traditions, through current Hellenistic symbolism (which encompasses both Hellenism and Persianism) and through local elements. As we have seen above, the emergence of Rome in the late Hellenistic East brought no restrictions; on the contrary, it brought a widening of the Hellenistic *koine* – at least until the period of the Augustan cultural revolution. The Roman conquest of large parts of the Mediterranean and Near East will have strengthened the connectivity within the Hellenistic world further, and it therefore seems that in terms of material culture there were now more styles and forms of material culture available than ever before. The question of how to explain the absence of any reference to Rome – we have seen that even the term *philorhomaioi* cannot really be qualified as such and is, in fact, a form of Hellenism – is therefore easy to answer: Antiochan Commagene is pre-provincial. There is a great difference between what Antiochos I did and the projects of the so-called client kings Herod the Great and Juba II – and the reason for this difference lies in the watershed that was the Augustan period.²⁵³ Herod the Great and Juba II testify to the change that was the Augustan cultural revolution; the Antiochan project predates it. The imagined identities and dynastic projects of other *philorhomaioi* from the Greek East contemporary to Antiochos I, such as Ariobarzanes of Cappadocia mentioned above, seem to underline this distinction.²⁵⁴ This does not imply that they could not incorporate some distinctly Roman elements, but rather that this would have been the exception. The story, told by Polybios, about Antiochos IV speaking law in Antioch dressed as a Roman magistrate, underlines precisely how out of the ordinary such a thing was.²⁵⁵

aussi dans les aménagements agricoles et l'organisation des villages et des villes" ("Many genuinely original vestiges were created during this phase, compared to Greco-Roman series, in the field of architecture and sculpture, but also in agricultural development and organisation of villages and cities") (181). Dentzer has maintained the terminology of this (distinct) phase in recent publications; cf. *Dentzer 2007*.

²⁵² Explicitly *not*, of course, in a teleological sense. But it would help, at least, to evaluate the Antiochan visual language in its own terms, as something with a "réelle originalité" ("genuine originality"); see 4.4.

²⁵³ This important aspect is underplayed in *Kropp 2013*.

²⁵⁴ Ariobarzanes II Philopator from Cappadocia, the son of his self-declared *philorhomaioi* father, financed the rebuilding of the Odeion of Pericles in Athens around 50 BC; his mother was named Athenais.

²⁵⁵ Polybios 26.1, 1a.

3.6 Ideology, Social Order and Canon Building

Three hypotheses, which are all interrelated, can now be proposed to explain the reasons behind the Antiochan programme.

The first one, unsurprisingly, is ideology and propaganda. Propaganda revolves around the visibility of ideology as a cultural system, and hence the two concepts will be briefly discussed together here.²⁵⁶ One should not regard propaganda as a top-down process, but rather as a mutual development. Propaganda was an exchange or dialogue between the ruler and the ruled that united both groups. There was at least one other party involved in the dialogue: the rival king – the examples of dynastic identity building that have been discussed in this chapter have clearly illustrated that. But what about the ruled, the viewers? Here we face again the lack of knowledge about the Commagenean social context: we can say very little about the viewers. Antiochos' position and new political importance – after the disintegration of Seleucid authority and after Pompey's measures – required ideological underpinning and he developed a highly visible ideological system to fulfil this need. Imaginary or not, everything Antiochos I did demonstrated to both his people and the world around him that he had become a Hellenistic sovereign.

Secondly, it appears that the provision of social structure was also an important goal.²⁵⁷ The prescription of regular visits to highly standardised cult locations suggests that Antiochos I was striving for routinised behaviour that would generate social structure. Antiochos I, in other words, was about to offer his people a set of social practices in a clearly defined pattern, intended to constitute the social structure for his kingdom.²⁵⁸ In many respects the Antiochan programme must therefore be characterised as a project to construct social order.²⁵⁹ His ruler cult and its visual language

²⁵⁶ Describing the concept as propaganda/ideology is meant to include notions like *Selbstdarstellung* and *Herrschaftslegitimation*. Hekster/Fowler 2005 provides a useful introduction with further theoretical and archaeological bibliography; see also Root 1979; the introduction on *Kulturpolitik* in Lehmler 2005; Hekster 2015, Chapter 1; and the important critique in Pollock 2006 concerning the *uncritical* use of the concept. Useful general introductions to the subject in relation to material culture include Freedberg 1989 and Wolf 1999.

²⁵⁷ As many scholars have argued; see Manzmänn 1978, which laid the foundations for later interpretations in this vein. Cf. also Musti 1982; Allgöwer 1993, 275 (which talks about the ideological creation of a national identity); and, most recently (and with a somewhat different emphasis), Mittag 2004.

²⁵⁸ In antiquity ritual played a crucially important role in this respect. On this principle in general see the classic book Giddens 1984.

²⁵⁹ Cf. Manzmänn 1978, 585, which talks about "eine gemeinsame Normorientierung" ("an orientation on common standards").

in particular seem to have been created to produce an enduring social memory, which Antiochos I intended to be reproduced over and over again.²⁶⁰ Social or cultural memories are created and communicated through a variety of media, which could include ritual actions, visual display and texts. Antiochos I used all of these on a large scale and with the intent of being integrated and all-encompassing. The fact that, as far as we know, the *temene* were integrated in sanctuaries that already were well established underlines this point:²⁶¹ tradition and continuity were claimed for reasons of legitimation.

But why such a remarkably heavy investment in propaganda as an attempt to devise social structure? This question leads us back to the concept of ideology. Ideology – which can be defined as the self-presentation of social groups as historical entities – revolves around the mutual relationship between the group and the system of authority. This relationship can look very different. In some historical contexts, there will have been little need for the self-presentation of groups as entities: when the place of a group within the system of authority was evident, there was no need to claim a place. In other historical contexts, however, the need for groups to present themselves as a historical truth will have been acute in order to claim their place in society. The same is true for systems of authority that might be self-evident or not at all. The relation between groups and the system of authority – that is: ideology – constitutes a (cultural) practice and is constantly mediated. Ideology justifies the way the world is structured and it therefore has to be adjusted when changes occur. This applies to the people that make up the group, but also to the people that make up the system of authority. Their mediation is characterised by what has been called a surplus-value.²⁶² This surplus-value could be defined as the excess demand for legitimation; that is, the extra legitimation that is needed beyond the normal legitimation that was offered by the natural belief in the group or the system of authority. Ideology is the bearer of this surplus-value as it mediates between demand and supply. In other words: the less trustworthy your position factually is, the more ideology you need to implement to compensate.²⁶³ The Antiochan project suggests that the king was in serious need of ideology. He made such a remarkably heavy investment in propaganda as an attempt to create social

²⁶⁰ For ruler cult as “instant memory” with the Seleucid king Antiochos III, see *Ma* 2003a, 219–225.

²⁶¹ As argued in *Schütte-Maischatz* 2003, 111–112 and *Blömer* 2012, 103.

²⁶² On surplus-value, see the article by H. Moore on the ideas by Ricoeur in *Tilley* 1990, 85–120.

²⁶³ Kropp (*Kropp* 2013, 35) uses the German concept of “Legitimationsdruck” (“pressure of legitimation”) to explain the above.

structure, because he required a lot of surplus-value. He seems to have needed this extra legitimation for his kingdom, but Antiochos I and his *philoï* also seem to have needed ideology to integrate with the Hellenistic world around them.²⁶⁴ We know that military prowess and success was a defining element of Hellenistic kingship; hence the importance of the concept of “spear won land.”²⁶⁵ Antiochos I could not claim this. Do Antiochos I and kings of comparable small kingdoms invest so heavily in legitimation to make up for that?²⁶⁶

Following from the observations above – that the Antiochan propaganda project is an attempt to meet a large need for ideology on both a local and a pan-Hellenistic level by trying to create social memory – is its final characteristic. Thirdly, the Antiochan programme could be defined as (an attempt at) canon building.²⁶⁷ Introducing the concept of canon seems the only way to understand the rigidity that characterises the Antiochan project, with its uniform texts and stereotypical visual material culture. This behaviour is very much in line with one of the main characteristics of the canon; namely that nothing can be added, removed or changed.²⁶⁸ Coherence and repetition are therefore of prime importance to the functioning of a canon, like they were to the Antiochan project. The formation of a canon has a great deal to do with identity and ideology: a canon is often used as a survival strategy for cultural identity in times of crisis, in order to provide a new cultural coherence.²⁶⁹ Moreover, canon building is strongly related to cultural memory, because the past is often used as a point of

²⁶⁴ Kropp (*Kropp 2013*, 344–345) argues that Herod would have “the most arduous task of all Near Eastern client kings” because he had no dynastic legitimacy. I think, however, that exactly the same is true for Antiochos I. See also *Schwentzel 2010*.

²⁶⁵ *Strootman 2014*. ²⁶⁶ A suggestion I owe to one of the anonymous reviewers.

²⁶⁷ “Unter einem ‘Kanon’ verstehen wir jene Form von Tradition, in der sie ihre höchste inhaltliche Verbindlichkeit und äußerste formale Festlegung erreicht” (“A ‘canon’ is understood as *the* specific form of tradition, in which it reached its highest reliability of content and its most pronounced formal definition”) (*Assmann 1992*, 103). Cf. also *Stroumsa 1999*.

²⁶⁸ *Assmann 1992*, 103: “Nichts darf hinzugefügt, nichts weggenommen, nichts verändert werden” (“Nothing can be added, nothing taken away, nothing changed”).

²⁶⁹ “Ein Kanon antwortet auf die Frage: Wonach sollen wir uns richten” (“A canon responds to the question: where should we refer to?”) (*Assmann 1992*, 123). See also *Assmann 1992*, 125–126 and 127: “In Zeiten verschärfter innerkultureller Polarisierung, Zeiten zerbrochener Traditionen, in denen man sich entscheiden muß, welcher Ordnung man folgen will, kommt es zu Kanonbildungen. Der Kanon verkörpert in diesen Situationen konkurrierender Ordnungen und Ansprüche den Anspruch der besten oder der einzig wahren Tradition . . . Der geheiligte Bestand von Texten, Regeln, Werten fundiert und formt eine (kollektive) Identität . . . Kanon ist das Prinzip einer neuen Form kultureller Kohärenz” (“Canons are formed in times of increased intra-cultural polarisation and times of broken traditions, when decisions have to be made about the kind of order one wants to follow. In situations of competing orders and demands, the canon embodies the claim of the best or the only true

reference in the formulation of a new orthodoxy. In the Antiochan case, as we have seen, this tradition was largely an invented one. The historical context of Antiochan Commagene, as far as we know, seems to support this idea. In the insecure political circumstances of the pre-provincial Near East, Antiochos I needed a cultural identity for ideological reasons and he needed to create social order. Looking back at selected parts of the past that he could make use of, looking around to what his contemporary Hellenistic peers did, and anticipating a future in which the Romans would probably continue to play a role, he put one together – and tried to make it function as a canon.

To summarise, Commagenean archaeology from the first century BC largely consists of Antiochan material culture, which is part of a dynastic project or, in other words, the *mise en scène* of the ruler.²⁷⁰ We lack sources that inform us what happened “on the ground” and, therefore, we lack information about the relationship between this dynastic image and its direct social context. The Antiochan project is thoroughly Hellenistic, and can be characterised by the terms monumentality, visibility, ideology and eclecticism. It must be interpreted as an attempt at canon building in order to provide dynastic ideology and social order. In [Chapter 4](#) it will be argued that this canon was built up in a process of bricolage that is characteristic for the late Hellenistic world.²⁷¹ The Augustan programme, with its *Bildersprache* as it was executed from around 30 BC onwards, presents a remarkable and roughly contemporary parallel for the Antiochan project.²⁷² This could also be described as a thoroughly Hellenistic attempt at canon building, in order to provide dynastic ideology and social order, with bricolage as one of its main

tradition . . . The sanctioned body of texts, rules and values give roots and form to a (collective) identity . . . A canon is the principle of a new form of cultural coherence”).

²⁷⁰ For this characterisation, put firmly on the agenda by the various publications of Smith, cf. *Kropp 2013*, 343.

²⁷¹ The critique that concepts like propaganda are rather general and lack interpretative strength does partly apply to this conclusion as well: many dynastic projects have looked for canon building in order to provide ideology and social order. It is therefore important that [Chapter 4](#) further looks at how this was done precisely.

²⁷² It is therefore tempting to imagine thinking in terms of an Antiochan cultural revolution as well, or, at least, in terms of an attempt to achieve this. However, there is a lack of sources to corroborate such an interpretation for Antiochan Commagene. The Augustan *Bildersprache* was a cultural revolution because it was not simply an official language imposed from above, but one that was “internalised and absorbed until it became an integral part of Roman self-awareness.” It was “a deep stylistic change that embodies a moral one” (rephrasing after *Wallace-Hadrill 1989*; see now *Wallace-Hadrill 2008*). Although we can postulate a deep stylistic change in Commagene as well, we lack information regarding internalisation or absorption, and must therefore refrain from talking in these terms.

instruments.²⁷³ Together with the many other comparable cases presented in this chapter, this parallel underlines that what Antiochos I did, in structural terms, was not at all uncommon in the historical and socio-cultural context of the mid first century BC.

3.7 Questions

The final part of this chapter will return to the archaeology of Commagene, and apply the general insights formulated above to discuss the meaning of some of the archaeological data from Commagene in detail. What happens if we radically abandon the equation between a Greek-Persian/Iranian geographical context and a Greek-Persian/Iranian dynastic image, and take seriously the alternative approach formulated in this chapter, namely that this was a dynastic, Hellenistic project of invention and bricolage that used “ethnic” styles and references for the social meanings these had acquired?

3.7.1 The Elusive Ancestors

It is generally assumed that Samos I, an Armenian king who lived during the third century BC, founded Samosata, which later became the capital of Commagene.²⁷⁴ The only argument for this reconstruction is the fact that the name Samosata clearly derives from Samos, and that Samos I is presented by Antiochos I as one of his ancestors in his ancestor gallery on

²⁷³ For such an approach to the Augustan world, see *Galinsky 1996*. It is not my intention to suggest any direct correlation here. Noting the parallel is useful because it shows how typically late Hellenistic both dynastic projects were and how comparable they are in a structural sense.

²⁷⁴ See, for example, *Zoroğlu 2000*, 75; *Sartre 2001*, 424; *Schwertheim 2005*, 78: “(-) Samos scheint die spätere Hauptstadt des Reiches Kommagene, Samosata, gegründet zu haben” (“Samos seems to have been the founder of Samosata, the later capital of the Kingdom of Commagene”); and *Kropp 2013*, 107: “the capital Samosata which was founded by King Samos in the mid-third century BC.” In an attempt to come to a genealogical reconstruction of the Commagenean dynasty, Theodor Mommsen, in his contribution to the first *Athenische Mitteilungen* from 1876 (27–39), remarked on the connection between Samosata and Samos as founder of the dynasty: “Sollte diese Vermuthung richtig sein, was keineswegs ausgemacht ist, so wird man doch nicht fueglich in ihm den Gruender der spaeteren Dynastie erkennen koennen, da sonst sein Name in derselben wiederkehren wuerde” (“Even if this assumption proves to be correct, which might not necessarily be the case, we still would not be able to infer that we can recognise him as the founder of the later dynasty, because otherwise his name would reappear in the same [dynasty]”) (31). For all information on Samos see *Facella 2006*, 169–174, which follows the identification of Samos as founder of Samosata.

Nemrud Dağ. There is no evidence to support this claim by Antiochos I. The name Samosata is first encountered with Strabo, a Greek historian who wrote at the end of the first century BC and the beginning of the first century AD.²⁷⁵ It is imaginable, therefore, that Strabo followed an Antiochan-invented tradition, and that the city was only named Samosata from the Antiochan period onwards. If so, this would be an example of the process of geographical annexation. This principle is well known from our modern era – think of St. Petersburg, which returned to its original name after several decades of being called Leningrad – and was widely used in antiquity as well.²⁷⁶ It is possible that Antiochos I applied a similar strategy, especially because historical annexation and invention of tradition characterised the Antiochan project.²⁷⁷ Could Samos be some kind of Romulus?

The same reasoning applies to Arsames, and the two sites we know as Arsameia.²⁷⁸ There is no evidence for the use of these names prior to Antiochos I's texts. Antiochos I presented someone named Arsames – a king in Armenia from the second half of the third century BC, who is known through references in the literary record and coins – as his paternal ancestor after Samos I. He also claimed that the two towns were founded by his predecessor and that they were therefore logically his possessions. In general, scholars have taken this at face value.²⁷⁹ It could, however, be an invented tradition seeing that there is no real evidence for Arsames at

²⁷⁵ Strabo 14.2.29. It is possible, of course, that Strabo used older sources, like Eratosthenes, but this cannot be proved in regard to Samosata. In *Cohen 2006*, 187–190 sv. Samosata, it is argued that Eratosthenes provided Strabo with the name of the city, and therefore Cohen concludes that it is likely that Samos I (who predated Eratosthenes) was the founder.

²⁷⁶ On the power of names and the ability of new names to alter indigenous traditions in the Hellenistic East, see *Butcher 2003*, 99–100. On this practice in the ancient Near East more in general, see *Harmansah 2013*.

²⁷⁷ Therefore, the conclusion of *Sullivan 1990*, 60 that “The attention of Samos to construction of the dynasty has left a vivid commemoration in the great rock relief of him overlooking the Euphrates at Gerger, and probably in the name of the major dynastic city, Samosata,” does not stand up to scrutiny. The name of the capital could thus well be a form of geographical annexation; moreover, the Gerger rock relief is now generally considered to be Antiochan, and to represent Samos II (see below).

²⁷⁸ For all information on Arsames, see *Facella 1999* and, summarising, *Facella 2006*, 174–184.

²⁷⁹ As Dörner wrote (in: *Hoepfner 1983*, xii) on Yeni Kale: “sie wurde nach erster Besiedlung in prähistorischer Zeit von dem König Arsames angelegt” (“it was founded by King Arsames on a pre-existing Prehistoric site”). See also *Hoepfner 1983*, 61: “Ältestes Hierothesion ist Arsameia am Euphrat, wo die königlichen Vorfahren begraben sind, beginnend vermutlich mit dem Stadtgründer Arsames im 3. Jh. v. Chr.” (“The earliest *hierothesion*, Arsameia on the Euphrates, where the royal ancestors are buried, dating to the third century BC, began probably with Arsames, the founder of the city”).

Arsameia (ad Euphratem or ad Nymphaeum) whatsoever.²⁸⁰ This will be discussed further below.

Ptolemy, who was allegedly the founder of the Commagenean dynasty and ruled from circa 163 BC to circa 130 BC, is only mentioned by Diodorus Siculus, apart from the Antiochan inscriptions.²⁸¹ Diodorus, a historian from Sicily who lived from 90 to 21 BC, compiled his world history on the basis of historiographical traditions in use around 50 BC. He therefore cannot be regarded as a contemporary source for Ptolemy. There are no traces of Ptolemy in the archaeological or numismatic records. It is therefore possible that Ptolemy was in fact an Antiochan adaptation or invention. Apparently this invented tradition was recorded as a fact by Diodorus, which is not surprising given that it was also presented as fact during the period in which he compiled his manuscript.

We also have remarkably little evidence on Samos II, who allegedly reigned from around 130 to 100 BC. Antiochos I had his portrait done in rock relief at Arsameia ad Euphratem, with an accompanying inscription that used standard Antiochan phrases. There is no mention of Samos II in the literary or epigraphical records; there are only several coins and the ancestor-gallery inscription on Nemrud Dağ issued by Antiochos I. Apart from the coins – if they really were issued under Samos II (see below) – all information on his reign is Antiochan, and we should be reluctant, therefore, to take the information at face value. Facella's conclusion that the grandfather of Antiochos I was buried at Arsameia ad Euphratem therefore seems premature, although it is certainly the impression that Antiochos I wanted to convey.²⁸²

Even Mithridates I Kallinikos (circa 100 BC to circa 70 BC) is only mentioned in inscriptions by Antiochos I and furthermore known through (a few) coins.²⁸³ Most prominent is the inscription discovered by Dörner in Arsameia ad Nymphaeum.²⁸⁴ The inscription states that Antiochos I renovated this *hierotherion*, which had been built by his father in the

²⁸⁰ A recent general overview like *Cohen 2006*, 153 notes that the Armenian ruler Arsames founded Arsameia ad Nymphaeum and that, "Furthermore, he is probably the same person who founded Arsameia on the Euphrates. It is likely that a native settlement preceded Arsames' foundation." This clearly is common opinion but is thus, in fact, much less certain than imagined.

²⁸¹ Diodorus 31, 19a. Cf. lastly *Facella 2006*, 199–205 for all information on Ptolemaios and a discussion of this "breve e problematico passo" ("brief and problematical fragment").

²⁸² For all information on Samos II (as well as Facella's conclusion "l'ipotesi più plausibile è che il nonno di Antioco fosse stato sepolto lì" ("the most plausible hypothesis is that Antiochus' grandfather had been buried there")), see *Facella 2006*, 205–208.

²⁸³ See *Facella 2006*, 209–224 for all information on Mithridates I Kallinikos.

²⁸⁴ Originally published in *Dörner/Goell 1963*.

suburbs of Arsameia ad Nymphaeum, a city founded by their ancestor Arsames, and that both Mithridates I Kallinikos and Arsames should be venerated at this cult location. German campaigns in the 1950s sought confirmation of the information provided by the text, but they yielded no remains of the city proper, and in the *hierotherision* itself they found no real proof of a pre-Antiochan monumental phase. In fact, remains of the late Hellenistic period itself were not overwhelmingly abundant due to the severe destruction of the site. The remains that do exist largely fit into the standard repertoire of Antiochan material culture (*dexiosis* reliefs, ancestor reliefs, colossal statues, a cult inscription), and those that do not are insufficient to prove the existence of the earlier phase that Antiochos I claimed to have renovated and extended. The plateau upon which the *hierotherision* was built was certainly occupied before, as witnessed by some prehistoric finds, and there are even some finds ascribed to the first half of the third century BC, the period in which Arsames is believed to have lived. However, the descriptions by the excavators already make clear that this does not provide sufficient basis to reconstruct the building phase ascribed to Arsames.²⁸⁵

Another argument that has been put forward to prove the existence of a pre-Antiochan phase is the large *Felsenhalle* at *Sockel I* that would be a Mithraeum “perhaps even older than the *hierotherision* itself.”²⁸⁶ Although there is no real proof for this hypothesis, it has been used to postulate that Mithras was venerated in Arsameia ad Nymphaeum before Antiochos I. The etymology of the name Mithridates was subsequently used to

²⁸⁵ Hoepfner 1983, 6–7: some “frühhellenistische Scherben” (“Early Hellenistic pottery fragments”) and a “Torusbasis, vielleicht aus der Zeit vor dem Hierotherision” (“a column base, perhaps from the period before the *hierotherision*”). In the conclusion of Hoepfner 1983 it appears that, even among the excavators, there seems to have been a tension between the restricted evidence and the presumed historical fact: “Für das 3. Jh. v. Chr. sind auf der Eski Kale Siedlungstätigkeiten durch Funde belegt. Wir vermuten, daß Arsames, der Vorfahr von Antiochos und Stadtgründer von Arsameia, hier bereits bauliche Aktivitäten entwickelte, bei deren Nutzung Pithoi, Kochtöpfe und feines Geschirr eine Rolle spielten, so daß man eher an einen Privatbau denken möchte als an ein Heiligtum. Die Anlage dürfte auf Grund der geringen Spuren nicht groß gewesen sein. Ob es bei dieser Besiedlung eine Kontinuität gegeben hat, ist nicht zu sagen” (“There is archaeological evidence for activities on the Eski Kale during the third century BC. We assume that building activities developed under Arsames, the ancestor of Antiochos and early founder of Arsameia. The presence of *pithoi*, cooking pots and fine table-ware makes one think of a private building rather than a sanctuary. Due to the scanty remains it is assumed that the building was of modest dimensions. Whether there has been continuity in this settlement cannot be concluded” (51). Facella (*Facella* 2006, 175–176), however, does postulate a relation between the archaeological finds and Arsames.

²⁸⁶ Hoepfner 1983, 53–54: “vielleicht sogar älter als das Hierotherision.”

strengthen the idea that references to Mithras should be dated to the period of Mithridates I Kallinikos. This is a circular argument for which there is no proof.²⁸⁷

In all these cases the information provided by the Antiochan inscriptions has been taken as historical fact, and has provided the point of departure for the reconstruction of the topography and chronology of the period. However, the archaeological sources tell a different story. The tension between the two is evident from the final publication of the Arsameia excavations. The conclusion to the book duly mentions places of worship that Antiochos I would have encountered on the site – following the Antiochan inscriptions – but because this cannot be proven archaeologically, a “radikale Umbau” (“radical reconstruction”) is postulated as a solution.²⁸⁸ In his introduction to the same publication, however, Hoepfner prudently advocated a different approach by suggesting that, in fact, everything in Arsameia ad Nymphaeum relating to the dynasty was Antiochan and had to be dated to the middle of the first century BC.²⁸⁹ Later, in an essay published in the year 2000, he formulated a final – and in fact quite radical – conclusion on this aspect of the Arsameia excavations.²⁹⁰ After having substantiated that Antiochos I was building up a “Kunst-Religion,” and even a “Kunst-Geschichte,” he wrote:

The inscriptions present the *hierotheresia* from Arsameia ad Nymphaeum and Arsameia ad Euphratem as historical sites where the royal ancestors are buried. Subsequently all archaeologists and historians, believing this text, have tried to distinguish several older building phases at these sites. One wonders, however, why the ancestors of Antiochos were not buried in Samosata itself but in different places far away from the capital. One rather suspects that the royal tombs in the three *hierotheresia* were only created by Antiochos in order to boost the sanctuaries.

²⁸⁷ Allgöwer (*Allgöwer 1993*, 273) was already critical of this hypothesis.

²⁸⁸ Hoepfner 1983, 51 ff.: “Wie im gleichnamigen Arsameia am Euphrat fand Antiochos auch in Arsameia am Nymphaeum bereits existierende Verehrungsstätten vor, in die er seine Vorstellungen integrieren mußte” (“As in Arsameia on the Euphrates, Antiochos found existing places of worship also in the eponymous Arsameia on the Nymphaios, where he had to integrate his ideas”). For the postulated radical renovation there is no real proof.

²⁸⁹ Hoepfner 1983, 1: “Fest steht nach den Ergebnissen der neuen schichtmäßig ausgeführten Ausgrabungen ferner, daß Wort und Bild der in Kommagene propagierten Religion allein auf die Person Antiochos I. zurückgehen” (“Based on the results of the recent stratigraphic excavations it can be concluded that the written sources and the images pertaining to the religion propagated in Kommagene are exclusively based on the person of Antiochos I”). As with most introductions, the piece will have been written after the book was finished.

²⁹⁰ Hoepfner 2000. Note that this essay was intended to be a new interpretation: “Heute zeichnet sich nach neuer Durchsicht der Befunde und nach neuen Funden in Kommagene in wichtigen Details ein anderes Bild ab” (“Today, on the basis of a new review of the findings and new finds from Kommagene, a new picture emerges in important details.”) (58).

In both sites called Arsameia these tombs were obviously caves that could be easily constructed and then declared old . . . And the person who aims to distinguish older pieces amongst the reliefs surely responds to the expectations of the king, but probably he is on the wrong track.²⁹¹

It is worth recalling that no evidence has been found to substantiate other claims that were made in the Antiochan inscriptions. The Arsameia cult inscription describes a *basileion* – understood as “*Palastanlage*” (“palatial building”) by the excavators – that Antiochos I was planning to renovate. It is logical to assume that this was located on the Yeni Kale, but the German team did not find any traces of it.

Therefore, even when studying Antiochos I’s immediate predecessor, prudence is called for when using the Antiochan texts as historical sources. Blaylock clearly reflected common opinion when he wrote, in an overview article on the Tille excavations in 1998, that the development of the independent kingdom of Commagene “culminated in the creation of a series of grandiose monuments of Mithridates Kallinikos and Antiochos I at Arsameia, Nemrud and elsewhere.”²⁹² On the basis of the present evidence, however, this claim cannot be substantiated: archaeologically – and also historically, with the exception of some coins (for the perhaps doubtful status as historical evidence, see below) – Mithridates I Kallinikos is invisible outside the Antiochan realm.

This passage has shown that there are many uncertainties about the ancestors of Antiochos I.²⁹³ What has become very clear, however, is that Antiochos I wanted to convey a particular message about his

²⁹¹ Hoepfner 2000, 67: “So werden in den Inschriften die Hierothesia von Arsameia am Nymphaeum und Arsameia am Euphrat als historische Stätten geschildert, in denen königliche Vorfahren bestattet sind. Auf diesen Text vertrauend, haben alle Archäologen und Historiker mehrere ältere Bauphasen an diesen Orten unterscheiden wollen. Es ist aber zu fragen, warum die Vorfahren von Antiochos nicht bei Samosata beigesetzt wurden, sondern an unterschiedlichen Orten weit entfernt von der Hauptstadt . . . Die Vermutung liegt nahe, daß die königlichen Grabstätten in den drei Hierothesia erst von Antiochos geschaffen wurden, um die Heiligtümer aufzuwerten. In beiden Arsameia sind diese Gräber offensichtlich Felshöhlen, die leicht anzulegen und dann als alt zu deklarieren waren . . . Und wer unter den Reliefbildern ältere Stücke ausmachen möchte, entspricht zwar den Erwartungen des Königs, befindet sich aber wahrscheinlich auf dem Holzweg.” In the essay Hoepfner is very clear about the goals and results of the Arsameia excavations: “Bei den Ausgrabungen in Arsameia am Nymphaeum haben wir vergeblich nach den in den Inschriften genannten älteren Phasen im Heiligtum gesucht” (“During the excavations in Arsameia on the Nymphaeum we could not find evidence for the earlier phases of the sanctuary referred to in the inscriptions”).

²⁹² Blaylock 1998b, 120.

²⁹³ There are interesting parallels here with other Hellenistic dynasties like the Diodotids of Bactria, for which see Holt 1999, especially Chapter 3 (An elusive dynasty).

dynastic legitimation that can be summarised in four words: “We go way back.”²⁹⁴

3.7.2 Bricolage as Historical Evidence

This brings us to Antiochos I himself. This section has suggested so far that when we are dealing with a dynastic project made up by invention of traditions and bricolage, one should be reluctant to believe relative chronologies suggested by the dynastic image itself. In many of the examples discussed above we might well be dealing with claims, inventions or creative reinterpretations that were only partially related to reality. This, of course, also counts for the Antiochan phase itself. Below two examples will be adduced where the information provided by the Antiochan project has been taken at face value – as the reflection or outcome of a historical continuum instead of a conscious appropriation of specific elements – and the problems generated by such an approach will be indicated.

First there is the discussion on the relief from Sofraz Köy, discovered in 1974.²⁹⁵ (Fig. 3.9) It was argued that this *dexiosis* showed the initial phase of the ruler cult, and that it was definitely part of the Seleucid tradition. Arguments for this interpretation are: (1) the cult place was dedicated to Apollo and Artemis, gods that, together with Zeus, were popular with the Seleucids, (2) the gods were designated by their Greek names alone, (3) Apollo would be displayed in a particularly Greek style, carrying a laurel in his hand and not, as on Nemrud Dağ, a bundle of barsom, (4) in the text a prescription for an additional coronation day was added and (5) the language used would stylistically be less artificial than that of the great cult inscription from Nemrud Dağ. Based on this early dating of the Sofraz Köy relief, a relative and absolute chronology has been reconstructed for the Antiochan *Bildprogramm* as a whole. This chronology argues that there was an initial “Greek-Hellenistic” phase represented by the Sofraz Köy relief, while the “syncretistic” phase started after 64 BC and quickly reached its apogee in the building of the statues at Nemrud Dağ, dated to 62 BC based on the Lion horoscope. Sofraz Köy, Çaputlu Ağa, Adıyaman, Kılafık Höyük and, perhaps, Ancoz were dated to this early phase, before 64 BC when Antiochos I acquired the term *megas*.

²⁹⁴ Hekster 2015, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, especially 206–208 (Invented ancestry in the early Empire). See also Flower 1996.

²⁹⁵ See 2.3, sv. Sofraz Köy. For a summary of the discussion (and a compelling reformulation of the *communis opinio*) see also Jacobs/Röllinger 2005 and now Facella 2010, 186.



Figure 3.9 The relief of Sofraz Köy showing Apollo with a laurel.

The syncretistic phase would start with the evidence from Samosata and also include, for instance, the new Zeugma stele.²⁹⁶

This argument has several problems. Firstly, there is a specific one. The Sofraz Köy relief would provide the only evidence for an earlier, more Greek phase. To postulate a distinct phase on the basis of one *dexiosis* alone is dangerous: it could also be a unique or local deviation. Secondly and more general: why should a Greek phase necessarily be an earlier one? The Seleucid argument is not a strong one, as the popularity of Apollo and Artemis is too general an argument to be convincing. It seems that the idea of an ongoing, almost evolutionary “degeneration” from “still recognisable Greek” (due to the Seleucids) to “total hybridity” is implicit in this analysis.

²⁹⁶ On the relative chronology of the Antiochan *Bildprogramm* see extensively Jacobs 1998a and, most recently, Crowther/Facella 2003 (now with Crowther/Facella 2011); Mittag 2004; and Jacobs/Rollinger 2005. I do not deal with their conclusions here, but with their methodology.

Such teleological views of stylistic developments, however, should be discarded, especially in the Hellenistic period. Similar unsound reasoning appears to be behind the argument that “the more artificial” language in the cult inscription from Nemrud Dağ indicates that it came from a relatively later date. The reconstruction of a relative chronology based on one example that has some different characteristics seems therefore unsustainable; let alone the use of this example as a fixed point to construct an absolute chronology.

Also the Lion horoscope has been used as a fixed point in the chronology of Antiochan material culture: it would be the foundation horoscope of Nemrud Dağ and place the foundation at 62 BC. But its dating is disputed. Maurice Crijns calculated that the constellation displayed on the Lion horoscope should be dated to 109 BC instead.²⁹⁷ A reaction is critical of Crijns’ hypothesis in several respects and concludes that, in fact, both dates (109 BC and 62 BC) are feasible.²⁹⁸ In his most recent addition to the debate Crijns has defended his proposal at length.²⁹⁹ It is important, however, to realise that the date of the constellation displayed is not necessarily congruent with the date of the Lion horoscope’s creation. Antiochos I could well have made the horoscope in 50 BC to recall or claim an event that occurred in 62 BC or 109 BC – or any date before its fabrication – and therefore have displayed this specific constellation.³⁰⁰ Such a strategy would not be at odds with the way in which Antiochos I used the past in his dynastic programme in general. Be that as it may, the date of the constellation on the Lion horoscope cannot be used to build an absolute chronology of Antiochan material culture.

Theories on the Sofraz Köy relief, as summarised above, start from the assumption that the Antiochan project is the outcome of a historical process of *Verschmelzung* (“fusion”), and they provide an explanation for the presence of the different Greek and Persian/Iranian elements through some sort of evolutionary process of cultural interaction. This chapter has argued, however, that this is not the case and that the elements in the dynastic project were selected and manipulated for specific reasons. Against this background, to claim an initial and “less hybrid” phase of ruler cult in a more Seleucid and Greek tradition based on a single artefact is highly problematic.

²⁹⁷ Crijns 2002. ²⁹⁸ Heilen 2005. ²⁹⁹ Crijns 2014. Compare also Facella 2014.

³⁰⁰ In a similar vein, already Crowther/Facella 2003, 64: “It seems more likely that the significance of the astronomical event was realised by Antiochus in retrospect and brought into prominence later to correspond to a new representation of his relationship with the gods of his pantheon.” See now also Facella 2014.

This (methodological) problem is further illustrated by the debate about the existence of earlier phases of Nemrud Dağ. In fact, all scholars working or writing on the mountain have speculated about the existence of earlier phases.³⁰¹ Indeed it is not illogical to assume that such a distinct hilltop knew some level of religious continuity, and was also used as a place of worship before Antiochos I. Combined with the image Antiochos I created of himself as standing in a dynastic tradition, this has apparently led scholars to believe that Nemrud Dağ had earlier phases. Goell, to give but one example, thought that Hittite architectural parallels suggested that Nemrud Dağ may have already been a sacred high place in the second millennium BC – the massive building activity of Antiochos I would have erased any sign of this.³⁰² There is, however, no proof whatsoever for the existence of an earlier phase. There is nothing on Nemrud Dağ that can with certainty be dated to the pre-Antiochan period. The choice of two different constructing materials – hard stone for the statues, tuff for the reliefs – is sometimes interpreted chronologically, but is logical from a practical point of view. Some reliefs show erased inscriptions; but we do not know what they said, or how they should be dated. It is speculative to assume that they are pre-Antiochan.³⁰³ As has been argued above, the date of 109 BC, which may be indicated on the Lion horoscope, cannot be used as a fixed chronological point. There is debate as to whether construction details can be used as arguments for establishing a chronology³⁰⁴ – differences in construction can also be explained, for instance, by the considerable time period it would have taken to build the monument. For the moment, we therefore have to conclude that, although it is not illogical to assume an earlier cult location existed on such

³⁰¹ Cf. Waldmann 1973, 54; Şahin 1991a, 115; Jacobs 2000a, 35; Hoepfner 2000, 66; Mittag 2004, 7–9; Crijns 2014. In *Nemrud Dağ Project 1*, 99–101, the “tuffit” phase is tentatively ascribed to Mithridates I Kallinikos; note already some counter-arguments in the same text.

³⁰² Goell/Sanders, 8, 141–143 and 163 n. 65, a suggestion followed in Wilkinson 2003, 207, without any argument. Note that there are many examples of early imperial sanctuaries in Syria where earlier phases, monuments or artefacts of the cult place have been faithfully integrated into later building activities; cf. Freyberger 1998, 38–39.

³⁰³ Here lies the importance of attempts by a team from Groningen University to come to a reading of these “palimpsest” texts through computer analysis of digital scans; so far, however, without concrete results. Cf. *Nemrud Dağ Project 1* and 2 (contributions of Van Nijf and Schipperheijn) and now Brijder, 506–510.

³⁰⁴ As, for example, does Şahin 1991a. Goell/Sanders, 152, was already critical of these arguments. In addition, the fact that the base of the colossi on the West Terrace covers the base of the tuffit slabs does not prove the existence of a pre-Antiochan phase. The fact that the statues are mentioned in the *nomos* but the tuffit slabs are not might mean something, but it seems unlikely that it indicates a chronological difference, as in terms of content the two are clearly related to each other.

a distinctive spot, there are no indications that can prove the existence of such an earlier phase.³⁰⁵ If we compare this to Arsameia ad Nymphaeum, where, as described above, intensive searches have not revealed earlier phases, it seems best not to pursue these arguments.

3.7.3 Beyond the Dynastic *Mise en Scène*

It may appear to be overcritical to ask questions like the ones in this section, seeing that it is equally impossible to prove that the hypotheses critically discussed are *incorrect*. With regard to the example of possible earlier phases on Nemrud Dağ: it is perhaps not certain that there were any, but at the same time it can neither be proven that there were *no* earlier phases.

The purpose of this section has been to illustrate very practically, on the basis of concrete and applied archaeological questions and problems, the different perspective that this chapter hopes to have generated. This is, of course, an alternative perspective, not a fact. This perspective has been applied radically in the examples above to demonstrate its character. Therefore I have not tried to argue that Ptolemy, Samos II and Mithridates I Kallinikos never existed, nor that they were an Antiochan invention and that, for instance, coins showing them are in fact all Antiochan.³⁰⁶ Instead I have tried to illustrate that the interpretation of Antiochan material culture through texts and images designed by Antiochos I *alone* entails serious problems that are often not fully realised. This is necessary as the field is still characterised by methodological confidence about our sources. The over-dependence on the epigraphic, textual

³⁰⁵ I therefore agree with the (fierce) criticism by Jacobs (in *Jacobs/Rollinger 2005*, 139–141) on the hypothesis regarding different phases published in *Nemrud Dağ Project 1*, 99–101. It would have been fair, however, if Jacobs had mentioned that this paragraph (99–101) charts possible arguments as well as counter-arguments and that objections to the *Frühdatierung* (“early dating”) are already advanced in the same text (*Nemrud Dağ Project 1*, 101: “It may be best to reserve judgement on this hypothesis at this stage of our research,” followed by several objections to the idea and ending with the remark “The scholar looking for different phases in Antiochos’ building program is therefore warned”).

³⁰⁶ *Babelon 1890* only lists several examples of coins showing Samos II, Mithridates I Kallinikos and Antiochos I, and the amount and variation seem not to have risen significantly in the last 120 years. There are, however, many more examples of coins showing later Commagenean kings. M. Facella is preparing a monograph on Commagenean coins that will enable further research; see already *Facella 2005b* and some remarks in *Facella 2012*, 79–82. With our present knowledge, however, it seems thus not far-fetched to consider the possibility that these coins were, in fact, a sort of medallion struck by Antiochos I; note the observations by Kropp (*Kropp 2013*, 232) on “The rarity of these coins, their crude workmanship, and the fact that the Commagenean kings never minted silver.”

information in such interpretations is typical.³⁰⁷ However, the history of Commagene cannot be written on the basis of Antiochan texts (or images) alone.³⁰⁸

A comparison from another Hellenistic region may serve as a final illustration of the problem that this section has addressed. Rhakôtis, the name of the autochthonous Egyptian quarter of Hellenistic Alexandria, was, until recently, generally thought to refer to the original Egyptian settlement on the spot, existing before the foundation of Alexandria by Alexander the Great in 331 BC. Scholars thought that there was an earlier Pharaonic settlement as textual evidence from the Hellenistic and Roman periods said so; and they assumed that this “original Egyptian element” would have been preserved in the autochthonous Rhakôtis quarter from Hellenistic Alexandria. Had it been possible to excavate the area of ancient Rhakôtis, so it was presumed, the Pharaonic Egyptian village would certainly be found underneath, or amid, the Hellenistic city. The fact that Egyptian sources from the Hellenistic and Roman periods even continued to refer to Alexandria by the name of Rhakôtis was seen as yet another sign of proof that there had been such an earlier Pharaonic settlement. Michel Chauveau has now demonstrated, however, that Rhakôtis in fact means “under construction” or “building site” and that the designation originally referred to the city that the Egyptians saw being built at such immense speed in their delta.³⁰⁹ There is, therefore, no proof whatsoever for an earlier, Pharaonic settlement. From the Egyptian point of view, designating the city in terms of public works – even after many centuries – and not, as other important capitals, with a religious association, would have indicated that they continued to see Alexandria as a city where their Greek kings lived, and not as properly Egyptian. The Alexandrians, on the other hand, were eager to stress continuity from the Pharaonic to the Greek period to legitimise their own position. They therefore might have invented

³⁰⁷ To give a recent example: on the basis of a confluence of the names of some of the Antiochan gods (Mithras-Apollo and Helios-Hermes becoming Mithras-Helios-Apollo-Hermes) Mittag argued that Arsameia ad Nymphaeum saw several first-century BC building phases (Mittag 2004, 9: “Auch die Anlage in Arsameia am Nymphaeum weist unterschiedliche Bauphasen auf”) (“Also the site of Arsameia on the Nymphaios has different building phases”); thus totally ignoring many years of archaeological fieldwork that reached opposite conclusions.

³⁰⁸ The recent work by Michael Blömer develops a similar alternative perspective (and reasons from a similar critique on most earlier views in this respect); see, for instance, Blömer 2012, 98: “While the religion of Antiochos I is of utmost importance for the study of late Hellenistic royal ideology and ruler cult, it seems unsuitable as a starting point for the study of religious life in Commagene . . . It is rather advisable to exclude the royal testimony.”

³⁰⁹ Chauveau 1999, now with the remarks in Depauw 2000 and Baines 2003.

a Pharaonic predecessor settlement to do so; or creatively misunderstood and misinterpreted the Egyptian habit of calling Alexandria by the name of Rhakôtis. This invention or misinterpretation, however, was duly presented as fact in ancient sources and consequently understood as factual evidence by modern scholars. This clearly illustrates the danger of looking for archaeological proof of invented traditions. Rhakôtis turned out to be a “mythical village”; it is possible that the same might be true for some (or many) of the Antiochan claims.

When Karl Sester discovered Nemrud Dağ in 1880 or 1881, he described the statues as Assyrian monuments. This was the first of many attempts to define the Antiochan visual language or style.¹ Notwithstanding the many differing proposals, from Sester to the present day, there seem to be two recurring opinions on the Antiochan style. First, that it was in some way or other a blend of something Eastern – often defined as Persian or Iranian – and something Western – always defined as Greek. Second, that it was local, non-representative and unsuccessful: many scholars seem to hold a negative value judgement of the Antiochan style, explicitly or implicitly. Some of the reasons behind these opinions have already been discussed in [Chapter 3](#). The first interpretation, of blending, is probably born from the fact that most scholars perceive late Hellenistic Commagene and its dynastic imagery as the outcome of a process of *Verschmelzung* (“fusion”) because of its geographical position. The second interpretation, of artistic and stylistic failure, is probably born from the perception that Antiochos I was a megalomaniac, doing bizarre things in some unrepresentative periphery.

This chapter opens with a short summary of the different understandings and applications of the concept of style in relation to material culture. Such a basic introduction is necessary because – much unlike the concept of identity – style has become a rather neglected topic in archaeological theory and interpretation today. The [next section](#) will review the definitions and interpretations of Antiochan style that have thus far been presented by scholars. The majority of these interpretations, however, cannot be brought in line with the analysis presented in the conclusion to [Chapter 3](#): namely, that the Antiochan project was a quintessentially Hellenistic attempt at canon building in order to provide dynastic ideology and social order. Looking for an alternative understanding that *is* in line with these earlier conclusions will result in the conclusion that the Antiochan style is not at all something of a *Verschmelzung* (“fusion”), but shows a juxtaposition of discrete elements. It is necessary, therefore, to

¹ See Dörner 1987, 11–17.

rather think in terms of bricolage to better understand the eclecticism that characterises the Antiochan project. Subsequent sections will explore the history and the meaning of the elements used, in order to reconstruct the reasons behind this specific way of bricolage – and look for parallels to better understand it. What do the Greek and Persian/Iranian elements stand for and how do they function – what do they do – in other historical contexts? And can we find examples of eclecticism in the Mediterranean and Near East in the first century BC, which are contemporary to and comparable with the Antiochan project? To come full circle, the [final section](#) of Chapter 4 will integrate the insights on the nature of the Antiochan style with the conclusions reached in [Chapter 3](#) on the function of the Antiochan project itself.

Perhaps the best overture to this chapter is the impression that Hamdi Bey, one of the earliest explorers of Nemrud Dağ, gave of his encounter with the colossal statues. While the heads had “a certain sense of artfulness” (“un certain sentiment de l’art”), he remarked on the statues themselves:

They are reminiscent, all in all, of those grotesque figures that one sometimes finds amusing to fabricate from snow. The idea behind the design of the monument is the grandiose, the imposing and magnificent. With this type of stone and these disproportionate dimensions, it has been a lost effort to try and make real art, and besides, were there even artists capable of such a thing in this time of decadence?²

Although Hamdi Bey doesn’t mention the word itself, it is clear that he uses the concept of style implicitly in order to value the statues – reaching the disarming conclusion that they are best compared to snowmen. The overview below will show that style has indeed often been used to arrive at value judgements about (ancient) monuments and artefacts. It will also make clear, however, that we should rather focus on the social function of styles – or, in other words, on their impact and agency – in order to understand both what styles represent and what they do – also for Antiochan Commagene.

It is thus crucially important to distinguish between two different notions of the concept of style. First there is style in the sense of stylistics: distinctive, formal features of expression and execution of an object; its concrete, perceptible design. Second, there is style in the classificatory

² Hamdi Bey 1883, 17–18: “Ils rappellent, en tout, ces figures grossières qu’on s’amuse quelquefois à former avec de la neige. L’idée qui a présidé à la conception du monument vise au grandiose, à l’imposant et au fastueux. Avec cette pierre et ces dimensions démesurées, essayer de faire de l’art réel eut été du temps perdu, et, d’ailleurs, avait-on à cette époque de decadence des artistes capables d’une telle entreprise?”

sense of a culture-style. Style is then meant to refer to sets of common characteristics shared and displayed by large groups of artefacts over extended geographical ranges and/or periods of time. One could think here of qualifications like “Persian,” “Greek,” “Egyptian” or “Roman.” The problem with most historical and archaeological interpretations of style, as this chapter will illustrate, is that they do not differentiate between style as design (which we could call an objective understanding) and style as culture-style (which we could call a subjective, interpretative understanding). For most archaeologists and historians the style of an object is always and automatically a culture-style. Moreover, these archaeologists and historians often use the notion of culture-style in a much too limited way. For them a culture-style is classificatory in the sense of being related to a specific ethno-cultural group or a specific period alone. In reality, however, culture-styles are about “common characteristics shared and displayed by large groups of artefacts over extended geographical ranges and/or periods of time” – as the definition above – and thus *not* related to ethnically or culturally defined groups or specific periods alone.

This chapter will show that the relation between the concrete, perceptible design of objects – style in the objective sense – and the cultures with which these distinctive, formal features are connected – style in the subjective, interpretative sense – is much more complicated than often realised. Culture-styles like “Persian,” “Greek,” “Egyptian” or “Roman” certainly exist, but in the Hellenistic period they often do not so much refer to ethno-cultural groups or a specific period in time any more. They have come to stand for something else. Most often, therefore, these styles do not simply express cultural meaning but are used to make cultural meaning with. These culture-styles, in other words, are not a passive category in the sense of cultural classification; but should rather be seen as an active category in the sense of the creation of a specific image or association. Culture-styles thus certainly represent something, but what they represent is not a specific (“Persian,” “Greek,” “Egyptian,” or “Roman”) people or culture in its authentic form. Rather, I would argue, it is their own development through time, or cultural biography.³ The analysis in this chapter will show that the presence and agency that

³ For more background to this distinction see *Versluys 2013a* and *2014a* as well as *Versluys 2015a* and *b*. See *Van Eck/Versluys/ter Keurs 2015*, also for more theoretical and historiographical background to what is summarised here.

the particular cultural biographies of the culture-styles “Persian” and “Greek” were able to create was eagerly capitalised upon in the late Hellenistic world – and certainly not by Antiochos I alone.

Within modern European thinking, initially the concept of style was used in relation to material culture to make subjective evaluations of art – as Hamdi Bey does.⁴ These judgements were made from a teleological perspective, where likeness to real life was often considered the ideal. Therefore, artists and material culture were put on a relative scale from good to bad based on their style. It was soon realised, however, that there was a tension between style as an individual phenomenon and style in a broader sense.⁵ Style as an individual phenomenon can be useful in archaeology as a taxonomic tool, for example to identify Attic potters and vase painters. In this book, however, the focus will be on style in the broader sense: on style as a specific way of expression. The ideas on how this specific form of expression should be understood were largely formulated during the Enlightenment. In many eighteenth-century interpretations, styles were no longer subject to value judgements but thought to represent what was called “the tastes of nations.” To understand a specific style, so the Enlightenment scholars thought, one had to study the various factors that created it, such as its social and political context. In this way

⁴ General theoretical literature on the subject is immense, especially within the discipline of art history. A fine introduction is provided in *Preziosi 1998*, Ch.3 (with an introduction by the editor on four classic papers by Heinrich Wölfflin, David Summers, Meyer Shapiro and Ernst Gombrich) and (the introduction to) *Neer 2010*. I have also profited from: *Borbein 1973*; *Hebdige 1979*; *Podro 1982*; *Gumbrecht/Pfeiffer 1986*; *Assmann 1986*; *Lang 1987*; *Conkey/Hastorf 1990*; *Van Eck/McAllister/Van de Vall 1995*; *Carr/Neitzel 1995*; *Dietler/Herbich 1998*; *Borbein 2000*, 109–128; *Ginsburg 2001*; *Mason 2001*; *Elsner 2003*; *Hvattum 2004*; *Riggs 2005*; *Hahn 2005b*; *Tanner 2005*; *Porter 2006*; *Feldman 2006*; *Conkey 2006*; *Elsner 2007*; *Passini 2012*; and *Anguissola 2012*. Within present-day archaeological theory the theme remains underdeveloped, despite recent studies like *Neer 2005* and *2010*; *Gunter 2009* that has an important Chapter 3 on defining and interpreting styles; and *Meyer 2013* with a Chapter 6 on “Greco-Scythian art in practice.”

⁵ To illustrate this Ginsburg (*Ginsburg 2001*, 114–115) adduces a revealing passage from Vasari that is worth repeating. The text shows us Vasari talking to Michelangelo, in Rome, in 1546, after having visited Titian: “After they had left him, and were discussing Titian’s manner of working, Buonarrotto gave him considerable praise, saying how pleasing he found his colouring and his manner [*maniera*, style]; but it was a pity, he said, that in Venice artisans did not learn to draw well from the beginning and that Venetian painters did not have a better method of study . . . because whoever has not done enough drawing, and has not made sufficient study of choice things both ancient and modern, cannot do well by himself, nor can he improve those things that are taken from life.” So, while Titian’s *individual* style was excellent, his *Venetian* style apparently was not. For Vasari and ordering history with style, see several contributions to *Payne/Kuttner/Smick 2000*.

style became historical evidence, because every period and social context was thought to have resulted in its specific style.⁶ This is the notion of a culture-style as explained above, although in its limited, passive understanding as classification of a cultural group or period alone. One of the first scholars who explicitly applied such a model to antiquity was Winckelmann, in his *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* from 1764. There Winckelmann considers how styles vary due to differences between peoples and across time – although he still makes subjective evaluations of particular styles as well.⁷ The eighteenth-century idea that the world was full of many diverse culture-styles was maintained and strengthened during the nineteenth century. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel is a key figure to understand this development, especially his *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* from the years 1821–1831.⁸ In general, during this period, styles were seen as a metaphor for the culture (or period) in which they were produced and as such subject to value judgements. The scholarly work of the architect and architectural historian Gottfried Semper both illustrates and problematises this view.⁹ Although there certainly were more original thinkers trying to escape from the vicious circle that is culture-style thinking in its limited and passive understanding, like Henri Labrousse, it is only around 1900 that Alois Riegl provides a different perspective.¹⁰ In his 1893 *Stilfragen* he maintained that decoration and form exercised an autonomous power and he described this quasi-independent artistic will as *Kunstwollen*. Late Roman art, for instance, as Riegl argued in his *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie* from 1901, was not perceived as being in decline any more – for Riegl this style was the coherent expression of a specific and homogeneous *Kunstwollen*. This approach is important to archaeologists, particularly because of the emphasis it places on the active role of material culture, beyond mere representation of the *Zeitgeist*. During the early twentieth century in general, however, the tendency towards viewing style as a coherent phenomenon related to specific

⁶ For this principle (and its historiography) see Podro 1982; Hvattum 2004; and Passini 2012. Hvattum 2017 provides a fine summary of the eighteenth-century debate.

⁷ For Winckelmann and his understanding of style see several contributions to Payne/Kuttner/Smick 2000 and, most recently, Harloe 2013.

⁸ See Arndt/Kruck/Zovko 2014 and, more in general, Preziosi 1998, Chapter 2.

⁹ See Hvattum 2004 (for Semper) and Passini 2012 for a more general picture (from the 1870s onwards).

¹⁰ The recent interest in his work could be called a renaissance. See, for example, Olin 1992; Iverson 1993; Woodfield 2001; Elsner 2002; Elsner 2006b; Elsner 2010; and the introductions by A. Payne, A. Witte and A. Hopkins to the recent translation Riegl 2010. Cf. also Hölscher 2006, 237, which calls his approach a “bold concept of cultural plurality.”

cultures or races was stronger than ever before.¹¹ It was only after the Second World War that other approaches were explored on a large scale. In the study of material culture, style was now understood as a form of communication within or between groups. Stylistic behaviour, therefore, would relate to ideologies and strategies of legitimation. The social function of style was central to this approach. For example, material culture and its style were now seen as a sign of status and identity; as a vehicle for meaning and equivalence within and between different cultures; or as a significant bearer of aesthetic value. Within archaeology, this approach to style is associated with post-processualism. It implied a significant break with the past, as it no longer drew a direct connection between a specific style and a specific culture. One could say that it instead proposed that there was a connection between a specific style and a specific (social) identity.¹² Recently, again different approaches have been explored, which often go under the heading of art and agency.¹³ Such approaches argue that one should not think about style as being *in* context – style as a sign, an indicator, a bearer of meaning, etc. – but about style *as* context. The difference is significant. As has been briefly indicated, earlier opinions considered style to be a reflection, either of the quality of the artist who created it, the culture it grew out of, or the specific identities that used and influenced it. The Gellian perspective turns this upside down, and argues that material culture – with its style – is and does something in itself. In this view, material culture would not merely reflect the social context but constitute it – an idea that Riegl already started to explore. It has been explained earlier why the active, impact and agency approach is worthwhile to explore the Antiochan style in particular. The need for such an approach will have become even clearer after the conclusion reached in [Chapter 3](#) that Antiochan Commagene is largely a dynastic, Hellenistic project of invention and bricolage that used culture-styles for the social meanings these had acquired.

¹¹ It goes without saying that there existed strong value judgements about (Other) races, cultures and their supposed styles. The best, concise deconstruction (as “physiognomic fallacy”) of this ever-returning strategy to relate artefacts to styles and then styles to a specific (chronological) period or a specific (topographical) area is, perhaps, the lemma on style written by Gombrich in 1968 for the *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* (Gombrich 1998). For its historiography and working till the present day, see *Por/Radnóti 1990*.

¹² This development is very much tied up with (the influence of) postmodernism; *Conkey/Hastorf 1990* is exemplary in this respect.

¹³ General literature on art and agency, and materiality, has been quoted in 1.2. *Gell 1998* is fundamental to this approach; see earlier *Freedberg 1989* and later *Van Eck 2015*. Materiality is not often studied in relation to style; cf. *Elkins 2008*, 25–30.

4.1 “The Achievements of Hellenised Barbarians”: How to Describe the Antiochan Style

The first explorers of Nemrud Dağ were puzzled by what they saw and it is logical that they tried to describe the unique style of the colossal statues through comparisons with styles they were familiar with. Sester thought of the Assyrian world, and Hamdi Bey of snowmen.¹⁴

4.1.1 Humann, Puchstein and the Four *Topoi*

It appears that the German expedition had more problems in accepting, so to speak, the style of the monument.¹⁵ It is revealing to discuss the Humann and Puchstein publication from 1890, because many of their judgements remain influential to the present day.¹⁶ Their interpretation

¹⁴ Hamdi Bey (*Hamdi Bey 1883*) regarded the monument as a whole as “sinon bizarre, du moins fort imprévue” (“if not bizarre, at least very unexpected”) (28) and remarked on the *dexiosis* reliefs: “Pourtant l’artiste semble avoir voulu faire de l’archaïsme; ainsi, dans ses figures, excepté dans celles d’Hercule, les yeux sont en amande, c’est-à-dire, des yeux vus de face sur des figures en profil” (“Yet the artist appears to have wanted to make something archaic, hence his figures’ eyes, except those of Hercules, are almond-shaped. That is to say, when the eyes are viewed in profile on the figures”) (24).

¹⁵ It is only logical that the current chapter, written more than a century later, will have different conclusions, and it is not my intention in any way to discredit the fundamental work of these pioneers by showing how “old-fashioned” they were. The quotes illustrate, once again, that every generation has its own perception of “Greece” and “the Orient” and that nineteenth-century Germany had a rather specific one. This is by now a truism: see the important works *Marchand 1996* and *2009*. See more specifically for the topic of this book the articles *Hauser 1999* and *2001*. What is more surprising, perhaps, is the influence of these nineteenth-century perceptions until the present day.

¹⁶ In fact the text volume consists of different parts: the first part describes Humann’s travel to Ankara and Boğazkoi in 1882 (Humann was in Ankara on the explicit demand of Mommsen to make for him a print of the *Monumentum Ancyrum*); the second part deals with Puchstein and Sester’s visit to Nemrud Dağ in 1882 (by Puchstein); Puchstein and Humann’s exploration from 1883 (by Humann); and a more interpretative part called “Die kommagenischen Denkmäler mit Benutzung der Untersuchungen Karl Humanns beschrieben von Otto Puchstein.” In addition to a lengthy description of the monument at Nemrud Dağ, the third part also deals with archaeological remains encountered in Sesönk, Karakuş, Gerger and Selik. For archaeologists working in Commagene at present, it is comforting to see that some of the problems they encounter nowadays were already present then, such as the strong dependence on local knowledge (Sester owed his discovery of the monument to the Kurdish workman Bakó, 233) and the difficulty, especially on Nemrud Dağ, of distinguishing between man-made traces and natural ones (Humann and Puchstein already disagreed with Hamdi Bey’s opinion on whether something was man made in antiquity, or the result of natural weathering, 244 n. 1). Although the interpretative part of the book was written by Puchstein, it was based on the work of both; in quoting from this part I will therefore refer to “they.”

of what they call the “kunstgeschichtliche Stellung” (“position within the history of art”) can be summarised as follows:

The sculptures of Antiochos cannot, however, claim to be considered within the context of the general development of Greek art. They have not earned a place within this development, neither for their influence on later periods, nor for the sake of their own artistic significance (-). These sculptures are therefore only significant for the local history: they must be considered as achievements of hellenised barbarians and as such they should be regarded highly.¹⁷

Humann and Puchstein concluded that the sculptors were probably not Greek. The monument would have been made by indigenous artists, who had acquired knowledge abroad. The somewhat more positive judgement in the quotation above (“and as such they should be regarded highly”) was mainly reserved for the Lion horoscope, which would at least demonstrate something of a “uniform style.”¹⁸ Humann and Puchstein remarked on the colossi that the rough, schematic way of handling material was familiar from relatively simple artistic products from the older Greek period. The Hellenistic era they saw as characterised by a more lively style; and they therefore concluded that the colossal statues were not representative of the period they were made in – something that was subsequently explained by the low artistic status of the sculptors.¹⁹ Humann and Puchstein believed that the Antiochan style was not a genuine combination of Greek and Persian, because the colossi were too “empty and meaningless” (“leer und gehaltlos”) for that. If there was anything comparable to the style of Nemrud Dağ, then it was the late Cypriot or Palmyrene objects. It is interesting to note that, despite their negative value judgement on the Antiochan style, they did attempt to validate it. For instance, they highlighted examples that could be

¹⁷ Humann/Puchstein 1890, 345: “Allerdings können die Sculpturen des Antiochos keinen Anspruch darauf erheben, in einer Darstellung des Entwicklungsganges der allgemeinen griechischen Kunst berücksichtigt zu werden: dort haben sie weder durch ihre Wirkung auf die Folgezeit noch um ihrer eigenen künstlerischen Bedeutung willen einen Platz verdient . . . Ihren Wert haben diese Sculpturen daher nur für die Lokalgeschichte: sie müssen als Leistungen hellenisierter Barbaren geschätzt und als solche um so mehr beachtet werden.”

¹⁸ “Einheitlicher Stil.” The horoscope is then discussed in greater detail: the lion would be from “asiatischer Geschmack” (“Asian taste”) and would be executed in a late-Greek style. The lion statue flanking the horoscope showed a “rein griechische Formbehandlung” (“purely Greek treatment of form”) with an “asiatische Stilierung” (“Asian styling”).

¹⁹ The uncharacteristic style: “wird bei den kommagenischen Steinmetzen als Mangel an Kunstfertigkeit, wenn nicht als ein Zeichen ihres barbarischen Formensinns aufzufassen sein” (“as far as the stone masons from Commagene are concerned it can be understood as lack of their artistic skill, if not as an indication of their barbaric sense of design”) (348).

described positively.²⁰ It was impossible for Humann and Puchstein to view the style at Nemrud Dağ in a positive light altogether, however. They saw it as a local style with little Greekness, which had to be measured and validated in relation to the Greek ideal. This was a point of view widely held in their time, and continued to be so long afterwards.

Concluding, they characterised the Antiochan style as (1) a local phenomenon, that was (2) made by non-Greek artisans, that is (3) artistically uninteresting and had (4) something to do with a combination of Greek and Persian, even if “empty and meaningless” (“leer und gehaltlos”). These four points will be central to many later interpretations.

4.1.2 Twentieth-Century Explorers and Summarisers

As became clear in the discussion of Commagenean research in the last century, the period between the discovery of Nemrud Dağ at the end of the nineteenth century, and Dörner and Goell’s work in the 1950s, was one of relative silence.²¹ Only Franz Cumont discussed Commagene extensively in his monograph on Mithras, published in 1896 and 1899, and afterwards.²² This led to the role of Mithras in Commagene being overstated – as later research has illustrated.²³ In this period Nemrud Dağ was mainly dealt with as evidence by religious historians, while Commagene was sometimes mentioned in general overviews as an illustration of the meeting between East and West at the Euphrates. The (slim) volume *Orient und Hellas in den Denkmälern und Inschriften des Königs Antiochos I. von Kommagene* (*Orient and Hellas in the monuments and inscriptions of King Antiochos I of Commagene*) by F. Krüger from 1937 is illustrative.²⁴ Dörner and Goell were closely attached to Commagene, both in their scholarly

²⁰ For example, they applauded the style of the *dexiosis* reliefs – but only “wenn nicht die plumpen, unsicheren Proportionen all der Götter und Könige so störend wären” (“if only the awkward, ill-proportioned dimensions of the Gods and Kings had not been so disturbing”) (352–353). But when Humann wrote to Alexander Conze about what he was doing at Nemrud Dağ, he mentioned, amongst other things, that he was making a plaster copy (now in Berlin) of what he called “der herrliche Löwe” (“the delicious lion”); cf. *Radt* 2003, 500.

²¹ See 2.1.

²² See his essay on “three Commagenean mausolea” that forms part of his 1917 *Études Syriennes*.

²³ Cf. Dörner 1978b and, for the recent *communis opinio*, Gordon 1996 and Beck 2007.

²⁴ It is a thirty-nine-page *Inaugural-Dissertation* written under the direction of J. Keil. After an introduction on the discovery by Humann and Puchstein, Krüger presented a translation of the Nemrud Dağ *nomos*, and then proceeded with “Die religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung” (“the religious-historical investigation”). He saw the Iranian components as by far the most important and the Hellenistic element as secondary. Krüger interpreted the astrological aspects as a minor Mesopotamian component.

work and in a personal way. Therefore, probably, they both refrained from giving negative judgements on the Antiochan style – although they did so in rather different ways. Dörner saw Antiochan Commagene and the style of its material culture as a direct reflection of its historical and geographical position. He therefore viewed Antiochan style as Commagenean style – and valued it for what it was. Goell had more problems because she considered the label “Greco-Oriental,” so often attached to Nemrud Dağ and Commagene, as pejorative. She thought that this attitude – “not really Greek; not really Persian; so not really interesting” – explained the relative neglect of Commagene.²⁵ In both regards she certainly had a point. Her answer was a strong plea for the originality of the monument. The main argument to sustain this claim was that Nemrud Dağ was part of an indigenous, Anatolian tradition:

Evidence from the Hittite and Syro-Hittite periods shows that aspects of Nemrud Dağ’s design can be traced to indigenous prototypes . . . At the hierothesion of Antiochos we see a convergence of Hittite and Hellenistic influence . . . The hierothesion of Antiochos I of Commagene is thus very important because it partially answers the question: what happened to the Hittite style in architecture and sculpture after Carchemish . . . Nevertheless, Nemrud Dağ’s close affinity with the Hellenistic world to which it belonged is unmistakable . . . At Nemrud Dağ, a local tradition persevered at the same time that it submitted to foreign influence, the same process that occurred during late Hittite times; both resulted in designs that were stylistically eclectic . . . The architecture and sculpture confirm with consistency and coherence the broad religious, political and geographical influences that were at work in this region in the late Hellenistic period.²⁶

Goell argued that Antiochan architecture had little relation to Achaemenid monuments, but had a close affinity with the Hellenistic world.²⁷ However, most strongly she underlined the indigenous traits of Nemrud Dağ – in her words “the underlying tenacity of indigenous Anatolian traditions.”²⁸

²⁵ Goell/Sanders, 30–31: “It is a small wonder that the hierothesion of Antiochos I of Commagene, combining in eclectic physical form Old Anatolian Hittite, Greek, and Persian cultural influences, was not taken seriously in a manifest pro-Classical atmosphere. It was too Classical for Orientalists, too Oriental for Classicists.”

²⁶ Goell/Sanders, 150, from a section on “the affiliations of the architecture.”

²⁷ For a different opinion in that period, see for instance Will 1955, 232, which remarks: “Les sujets et la technique du relief plat situent ces compositions dans la tradition de l’art achéménide, non sans des traces manifestes d’influences helléniques” (“The subjects and the technique of flat relief-stelai situate these compositions in the tradition of Achaemenid art, not without evident traces of Greek influence”).

²⁸ Goell/Sanders, 151. For what are characterised as Greco-Hittite reliefs in the region, see Bruns-Özgan 2000.

Goell’s view could almost be characterised as a post-colonial perspective and was remarkable for that period.²⁹ Due to the delay in the publication of her work, however, Goell’s novel perspective was not elaborated upon and did not get the recognition it deserved.

In 1962, Roman Ghirshman proposed a new perspective in his *Arte Persiana, Parti e Sassanidi* (*Arts of the Persians, Parthians and Sasanians*), in which the Nemrud Dağ statues figured prominently.³⁰ He rejected the labels Greco-Oriental – always used in a pejorative sense – and Anatolian, in favour of a third description: Parthian. His work confronted common opinions, as it radically changed the Greco-Oriental perspective and asked how it was possible *not* to see this as Parthian art.³¹ During the same period, Daniel Schlumberger wrote *L’Orient hellénisé*, the first

²⁹ See Webster/Cooper 1996 and the discussion of such perspectives in Versluys 2014a.

³⁰ Ghirshman 1962, 57–69. Their prominence manifests itself more in the plates than in the text however. In 1962 a French and an Italian version were published; I quote from the latter. For Parthian art and its historiography see now the important small volume Jacobs 2014.

³¹ Although he admitted that Commagene was at the outermost border of the Parthian world, he described many clear “Eastern” indications (“la statua del re deificato, acconciato all’uso iranico”; “i rappresentanti del pantheon iranico”; “Eracle-Verethraghna, con i baffi alla moda achemenide”; “Dario il Grande, il Re, con in capo una tiara sovraccarica di scene figurate”; “L’aquila e il leone, che custodiscono il monumento, riprendono la posa degli animali-guardiani delle porte del Palazzo di Persepoli”; “Il gusto del colossale segue le tradizioni create nel passato e riprese dagli artisti achemenidi”; “Ma basta guardare il rilievo di Antioco ed Eracle-Verethraghna per rendersi conto della resistenza delle tradizioni iraniche”; “Sulla stele dell’oroscopo . . . il modo di raffigurare . . . riporta ai rilievi di Persepoli, e, da qui, agli inizi dell’arte dei Medi”; “scene tipicamente iraniche dell’ investitura”; “il barsom . . . è la traduzione emblematica del dio iranico venerato dal re”) (“the statue of the deified king, attired in Iranian fashion”; “the representatives of the Iranian pantheon”; “Herakles–Verethraghna, with a moustache in the Achaemenid fashion”; “Darius the Great, the King, with a tiara on his head featuring many figurative scenes”; “the Eagle and the Lion, who guard the monument, take the form of animal-guardians lying down at the gates of the Palace of Persepolis”; “the taste of the colossal follows the traditions created in the past and was continued by Achaemenid artists”; “but just look at the importance of Antiochos and Herakles–Verethraghna in order to realise the strength of the Iranian traditions”; “on the stele of the horoscope . . . the way of representation . . . shows the reliefs of Persepolis, and, hence, the initial art of the Medes”; “typical scenes of Iranian ‘investiture’”; “the barsom . . . is the emblematic translation of the Iranian god worshipped by the king”) – quotes from 57, 65–67; and forcefully concluded: “A tutte queste tradizioni di un lontano passato persiano, si aggiungono quelle, più vicine, del nuovo Oriente degli Arsacidi, che sono evidenti nel costume e nelle armi. Così, l’arte di Nimrud Dagh, pure non rinunziando a certe norme dell’arte greca, e restando fortemente legata alle formule achemenidi, tradisce una penetrazione delle nuove correnti venute dal mondo partico, che non tarderanno ad affermarsi nelle regioni limitrofe dell’impero iranico” (“To all these traditions of a distant Persian past, more neighbours were added from the new East of the Arsacids, as if evident from the costumes and weapons. Thus, the art of Nemrud Dağ, though not renouncing certain standards of Greek art, and remaining strongly bound to the Achaemenid formulas, demonstrates a penetration of new trends that came in particular from the outside world, and which did not take long to establish themselves in the neighbouring regions of the Iranian empire”) (69). Cf. also Metzler 2000. For the tiara in particular, see Young 1964.

interpretative overview of non-Mediterranean areas in Asia showing influences of the Greek style in their material culture. This work has a different, more nuanced approach.³² Schlumberger argued that Mediterranean areas that showed Greek-style influences developed “occidental Hellenism” (“a western form of Hellenism”); what is normally called Greco-Roman art. In the non-Mediterranean areas “l’hellénisme oriental” (“an eastern form of Hellenism”) would have come into being. Schlumberger distinguished three important moments within this process. Firstly, there were Greek imports during the Greco-Macedonian period – for example in Nysa – influencing local styles. Secondly, there were hellenised Iranian courts developing a true Greco-Iranian art. Thirdly, out of this Greco-Iranian style from the hellenised Iranian courts two important styles of material culture developed that would dominate the following centuries: Parthian art in western Asia and Greco-Buddhist art further to the East. The Commagenean monuments constitute Schlumberger’s main examples of Greco-Iranian art from hellenised Iranian courts and thus played a crucial role in his views on the development of “oriental Hellenism.”³³ Schlumberger’s overall evaluation is remarkable, especially when compared to the negative value judgements on the Antiochan style, which were characteristic of earlier and, as will be illustrated below, later periods alike. He placed value on the Commagenean monuments as the prime example of Greco-Iranian art and underlined their originality.³⁴

Malcolm Colledge included Commagene in his volume on the Parthian period for the series *The iconography of religions*.³⁵ Due to the absence of

³² Schlumberger 1970; a German edition was published the year before. Schlumberger had already published his thoughts on Commagene in an article of 1960 entitled “Descendants non-Méditerranéennes de l’art grec.” For a historiographic understanding of the concept see Hauser 1999. Leriche 2015, a collection of essays dedicated to Schlumberger, provides the most recent overview of “L’orient hellénisé” and a (critical) discussion on the idea itself.

³³ Other examples in western Asia would be the Hung-I Nauzuru relief and the Behistun reliefs from the late second century BC. Schlumberger names sites such as Khaltchayan and Surkh Kotal as examples of Greco-Iranian art from eastern Asia.

³⁴ Schlumberger 1970, 177: “Et pourtant l’originalité de ces monuments n’est pas contestable. Ils sont nouveaux . . . et leur nouveauté est sensible dans leur iconographie comme dans leur style” (“And yet the originality of these monuments is not questionable. They are new . . . and their innovation is evident from their iconography and their style”). In the same section, he argues that the Commagenean style is not just a hybrid but something new and original.

³⁵ Colledge 1986. However, he did not explicitly group them under the heading Parthian art; it would appear that he deliberately chose the word “period” in the title of this section. Parthian art – Colledge uses the term with reservation – was defined and characterised as having: “a generally didactic or symbolic purpose; a conceptual approach to representation; a hieraticism, linearity and love of patterning and decorative detail; and figure poses that look stiff and formal” (Colledge 1986, 13). For this problem see now Jacobs 2014.

monumental Parthian art, however, the Commagene example plays a rather large role in his general conclusions – and hence almost figures in the book as the example of Parthian art par excellence.³⁶ Colledge here faces the same methodological problem as Schlumberger, who regarded Antiochan material culture as proto-Parthian: stylistically there are no real comparisons from the same era. In and around this period, the Commagenean colossal statues and *dexiosis* also figured in general books on the Hellenistic world. Works that discuss Commagene as part of Greek or Hellenistic developments almost always reiterate the four points initially made by Humann and Puchstein: Nemrud Dağ would be an artistically uninteresting local phenomenon, made by non-Greek artisans who were trying to blend Persian and Greek styles unsuccessfully. Quotes from Smith that describe the Antiochan style as “synthetic” and “hollow” have been discussed in previous chapters.³⁷ Pollitt’s *Art of the Hellenistic age* is in the same vein, although it is less overtly negative. He described Nemrud Dağ as “not the most sophisticated” fusion of Greek and Oriental. For him it was “the last fling of ‘Hellenism’, that is, the superimposition of Greek traditions on the Oriental world conquered by Alexander.”³⁸ Hoepfner’s 1983 publication of the Arsameia excavations demonstrated an approach that, for the first time, was almost the opposite. He described the Antiochan style as “a classicising language of form that gained general acceptance only a generation later under Augustus” and even characterised it as “[t]his acutely felt and clearly programmatic classicism.”³⁹ Hoepfner’s view was radically different from almost all others in two respects. Firstly, because he treated the Antiochan style seriously. Here he followed Goell and Schlumberger, although he did not do so explicitly. Secondly, because he

³⁶ See, for example, Colledge 1986, 14: “The Iranians had long hesitated to show their deities in human form. During the Seleucid and Parthian periods, however, this seems to have become acceptable, and because of the lack of pre-existing Iranian divine iconographic tradition, borrowings were made from both the rich Greek repertoire and the contemporary world.” This would have been an interesting conclusion about the Nemrud colossi, were it not for the fact that the Nemrud colossi are his only evidence for that conclusion.

³⁷ Smith 1988a, 104 and Smith 1991, 227–228. See above respectively 1.2 and 3.5.

³⁸ Pollitt 1986, 274–275. The editor’s note in Goell/Sanders, 185 already noted that, in talking about the (western terrace) Antiochos, Pollitt erroneously illustrated the (western terrace) Apollo.

³⁹ Hoepfner 1983, 1 and 73: “eine klassizistische Formensprache, die erst eine Generation später unter Augustus allgemein üblich wurde”/“Dieser deutlich spürbare und sicher programmatische Klassizismus.” He uses the word “Klassizismus/klassizistischen” throughout the book to characterise architecture, sculpted architectural elements, sculpture and wall decoration. Note that already in 1883 Hamdi Bey had used the word “archaïsme” (“archaism”) as a characterisation. The recent find of Doric (!) capitals at the *temenos* of Güzelçay near Kahta are most interesting in this respect; see *Kommagenische Forschungen* VI.

suggested, through the use of the word programmatic, that the style should be understood as an active choice of appropriation instead of a passive reflection of its region or period, as all other scholars had done. Hoepfner, therefore, was the first scholar to understand the culture-styles brought together in the Antiochan visual language as concepts to make meaning with, instead of expressions of (different) cultures. Thus, he cautiously and rather implicitly suggested replacing Greek and Persian as absolute, classificatory categories with “Greek” and “Persian” as contextual categories with presence and agency.

The abundant literature on Antiochan Commagene during the past decades has not really proposed new perspectives. The Parthian interpretation has gone somewhat to the background;⁴⁰ while Hoepfner’s important suggestions have not been elaborated upon. Most general literature presents an amalgam of the different proposals.⁴¹ Specialised articles often argue that a particular element of Antiochan material culture should be interpreted differently than earlier literature has done in terms of *Zuweisung* (“determination”) – stating that the cultural character of a particular element is Macedonian, or Parthian, or Achaemenid or Iranian, etc. instead.⁴² Perhaps because of a more differentiated thinking about Hellenisation, the negative judgement on the Antiochan style generally seems to have waned.⁴³

This section has summarised some of the most important opinions on the style of Antiochan material culture. It has become clear that, with the exception of Hoepfner, all interpretations, no matter how different

⁴⁰ Note, however, *Mathiesen 1992*, 85–86 and the fact that *Jacobs/Rollinger 2005* was published in the review *Parthica*.

⁴¹ For example, *Der neue Pauly* sv. Kommagene (H. Kühne) has this on the Nemrud Dağ statues: “Im Stil hellenistisch-persisch, sind sie der Tradition der späthittitischen Grabdenkmäler verpflichtet” (“Hellenistic-Persian in style, they follow in the tradition of the late Hittite monuments”). A direct connection between Antiochan Commagene and (late) Hittite culture, as Goell believed in, can seldom be seen defended any more (probably because it will always remain rather general a conclusion) but has recently been taken up in *Messerschmidt 2011*, 283–307.

⁴² See, for example, *Allgöwer 1993*, *Petroff 1998*, several articles in *Gottkönige am Euphrat* and the recent article by A. Panaino in *Gnoli/Muccioli 2007*.

⁴³ A quote from *Butcher 2003*, 310 may aptly conclude this brief overview of scholarly thinking on the Antiochan style. It is interesting to note that it has preserved only something of the four *topoi* formulated by Humann and Puchstein in 1890: “The style is provincial, but the content combines Hellenizing and Iranian elements, making a statement about Antiochos’ ancestry and his identity as a descendant of the Orontids and the Seleucid and Achaemenid royal houses, as well as alluding to Roman consent to his rule. It is perhaps not surprising to find elite sculpture in a provincial style at the very beginning of our period, when architectural styles also combined elements from different cultural sources. And here we can at least comprehend some of the reasons for the particular combinations.”

their analysis, can be placed within the (modern) framework of the understanding of styles as metaphors of a people or a period: what has been characterised as “the limited culture-style interpretation” in the introduction to this chapter. An expert judgement on another style – that of the great cult inscription and *nomos* – effectively summarises this general picture. Based on the 1890 publication by Humann and Puchstein, Eduard Norden was able to pay ample attention to the great cult inscription and *nomos* in his famous *Die antike Kunstprosa* from 1898:

What other name is there for this showpiece of rhetorical skills than dithyrambic prose? The author, who composed the prose for Antiochos, knew that this King, who dwelled with gods as well as with his peers, should not address posterity like an ordinary mortal. We have to admit that he achieved what he desired. Undeniable, as a whole the work has its specific way of grandiosity, which finds its expression in this elevated passionate style. In the details, everything abounds from highly poetic and newly formed words.⁴⁴

Similarly to the style of Antiochan material culture, the style of the great cult inscription is characterised as artificially new and “elevated and passionate.” It is therefore not surprising that Norden did not place value on the style of “this showpiece of rhetoric skills” in the end. He finally concluded: “The pretentiousness, the pomposity as well as the daintiness of expression seems unbearable to us.”⁴⁵

4.1.3 Archaeological Interpretation and the Antiochan Style

The [previous section](#) was intended to provide a representative – not an exhaustive – overview of scholarly opinion on the Antiochan style. It does illustrate the main approaches and highlights two conclusions that are pertinent to the discussion in this chapter.

Firstly, the Antiochan style is often evaluated in terms of appropriateness or “what is fitting”: in other words, in a subjective way. The teleological ideal

⁴⁴ Norden 1898, 140–146: “Welche andere Bezeichnung gibt es für dieses Prunkstück rhetorischen Könnens als: Dithyrambus in Prosa? Der Rhetor, der ihn für Antiochos verfaßte, wußte, daß dieser König, der mit Göttern wie mit seinesgleichen verkehrte, nicht wie ein gewöhnlicher Sterblicher zur Nachwelt reden dürfte: und man muß sagen, daß er erreicht hat, was er erstrebte. Eine gewissene eigene Art von Grandiosität, die ihren Ausdruck in dem leidenschaftlich gehobenen Stil findet, läßt sich dem Ganzen doch nicht absprechen. Im einzelnen wimmelt alles von hochpoetischen und neugebildeten Worten.” The quotes are from p. 145. See also Waldis 1920.

⁴⁵ Norden 1898, 140–146. The German expressions read “leidenschaftlich gehoben”; “dieses Prunkstück rhetorischen Könnens”; and “Die Gespreiztheit, der Schwulst und die Zierlichkeit des Ausdrucks ist uns meist unerträglich.”

here is not likeness to real life, but likeness to the ideal of a pure – Greek or other – form. As the Antiochan style is far from that ideal, a negative value judgement is made: that it is not appropriate. There is a strong tendency to link the Antiochan style to a specific culture, for example Greek, Hellenistic or Parthian. As it is undeniable, however, that the style is not Greek, Hellenistic or Parthian in the more or less pure form that is envisaged, it is necessary to add an explanation to account for the adjustment. This seems to be one of the most important characteristics of the opinions that have been summarised above. The style would be Greek – *but* Greco-Oriental; the style would be Greek – *but* provincial; the style would be Hellenistic – *but* very late Hellenistic; the style would be Hellenistic – *but* designed by a megalomaniac; the style would be Parthian – *but* on the edge of the Parthian world. Etcetera. Goell, Schlumberger and Hoepfner are the only real exceptions to this trend. Therefore, the first conviction that seems to form the basis of thinking about the Antiochan style is that it is either something out of the ordinary, or something not genuine. [Chapter 3](#), however, has argued for a very different view on the Antiochan project in general. In common with many Hellenistic kings before, during and after his time, Antiochos I designed an ideological system to create a surplus-value, either for his subjects or for the Hellenistic world at large, and probably for both. As a visual strategy, the Antiochan style was central to this ideological system. In doing so, he used many common Hellenistic dynastic elements. As has been shown, the end result is unique, but only in the specific way that combined the different elements. This may have important consequences for a discussion of the Antiochan style, because it implies that we have to look at the process behind this “unique” style. This process has already been described as bricolage in [Chapter 3](#).

Secondly, it is often maintained that the Commagenean context – be it its geographical position, its chronological phase, or the mental condition of its ruler – determined the Antiochan style. In this view, the elements that made up the Antiochan style are understood by supposing a direct relationship between the geographical context and its style or the political and social context and its style. An example of the first is the idea that the Antiochan style would literally illustrate the (geographic) blending of East and West. An example of the latter is the idea that, through his style, Antiochos I would be demonstrating that he was Greek and Persian/Iranian alike, in ethnic or in cultural terms.⁴⁶ [Chapter 3](#), however, has argued that this also may not have been the case and that Commagenean

⁴⁶ The names Antiochos I gave to the gods of his pantheon are often used to underline this point.

material culture is mainly a dynastic display, built up from various discrete elements that do not necessarily have a direct relationship with ethnic groups in the social context. In addition, we do not know what that social context looks like. This has important consequences for a discussion of the Antiochan style, as it implies that we should not understand this primarily as a reflection of the (supposed) ethnic or cultural make-up of the kingdom, but as an active, and in this case dynastic, choice.⁴⁷

Therefore, in order to seek a better understanding of the Antiochan style, this chapter proposes to go beyond interpretations such as Greco-Oriental, Hittite-Anatolian, provincial, late Hellenistic or (pseudo-)Parthian. It will try not to measure it in degrees of Greekness, Hellenisation or Parthian-ness. Following the ideas of Hoepfner and the conclusions to [Chapter 3](#), this chapter aims to study the Antiochan style as eclecticism applied in an active choice by focusing on the impact that the particular cultural biographies of the concepts “Persian” and “Greek” were able to evoke.

4.1.4 Bricolage and the Juxtaposition of Discrete Elements

Prior to pursuing this analysis, it is first necessary to define the Antiochan style more precisely. Clearly in some way different visual traditions are combined. But what traditions exactly? And how? And how should something like “eclecticism applied in an active choice” be coined and interpreted?

Partly these questions have already been discussed within Commagene research due to discomfort with the term Greco-Oriental – which is very general and imprecise indeed. In particular, scholars have attempted to define the second part of this description more specifically. First it was proposed that Oriental should be replaced by Persian; later that it would be more appropriate to talk about Iranian.⁴⁸ In themselves, however, these concepts – Greco-Persian or Greco-Iranian – have also been strongly criticised because such a label obscures all kinds of complexities and local differences regarding style, production and patronage.⁴⁹ As important is the fact that what we are dealing with are not so much original and

⁴⁷ A point rightly emphasised in *Smith 1988a* and *1991*.

⁴⁸ See now *Jacobs 2017* with earlier bibliography.

⁴⁹ Dusinberre (*Dusinberre 2003*, 163) notes that “The name ‘Graeco-Persian’ represents a stylistic grab-bag category that seems to have defied firm definition.” Equally critical is *Jacobs 2002a*, 388. See for a critique of this term as it is used for the Achaemenid period in Anatolia, *Boardman 2000*, 152–174 and *Dusinberre 1997*. Petit (*Petit 2007*, 9–32), however, argues to maintain the term “l’art gréco-perse” (“Greco-Persian art”) for the material he discusses; he does not deal with Commagene. For the problem with such attributions more in general see *Meyer 2013*.

authentic Persian or Iranian elements but, as rightly underlined by Kropp, the “imaginative recreations of ancient Persian garb”; and he therefore characterises the Antiochan style as a “peculiar blend of Hellenistic and Achaemenid or pseudo-Achaemenid styles.”⁵⁰ Still, many discussions on the Antiochan style first attempt to give new names to the constituent parts of the contamination and subsequently try to measure the degree of influence of either the first or the latter “tradition.”⁵¹ Scholars often postulate that what lies behind what they understand as the combination of two distinctive cultural traditions is a process of syncretism.⁵² This is triggered by the fact that the Antiochan gods are presented in what is often described as a syncretised form: as Zeus-Oromasdes, Herakles-Artagnes, etc. The term “syncretism,” however, is not without its problems. It is most often used to describe religious processes. The term has a tendency to imply a random and unsystematic merging of elements from different pure – that is: non-syncretistic – religions, and it was therefore often used in a pejorative way. In this vein, the “pure” religion of the Greeks was seen as having been corrupted by foreign influences in the syncretistic Hellenistic period, before giving way to the other “pure” religion of Christianity. Within religious studies the concept has therefore met with strong criticism: pure religions, of course, do not exist, and foreign elements are almost never introduced randomly, but always appropriated purposefully.⁵³ Given this just criticism it seems wise not to use the term syncretism to describe first-century BC Commagene or the Antiochan style. Moreover, the concept has limited explanatory value: what was not syncretised in some way in the (late) Hellenistic period?⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Kropp 2013, 360 and 186 respectively. See already Smith 1988a and 1991, as well as Fowler 2005.

⁵¹ See, to give but one example, Musti 1982, which thinks that what he called the “Asian” tradition was the most dominant element.

⁵² Cf. Facella 2006, 282, in which Facella talks, as very many scholars do, about “sincretismo religioso” (“religious syncretism”) as does Koch 2002. Interpretations such as *interpénétration* and *mélange* are in this domain.

⁵³ See, from an abundant bibliography, Stewart/Shaw 1994; Motte/Pirenne-Delforge 1994; Aijmer 1995; Stewart 1999; Bernand/Capone/Lenoir/Champion 2001; and Graf 2005.

⁵⁴ As Françoise Dunand underlined: “Je ne pense pas qu’on puisse parler, dans le cas de la Commagène d’Antiochos Ier, de <syncretisme>, mais plutôt d’une rencontre entre deux univers religieux et culturels” (“I do not think we can speak, in the case of Antiochos I of Commagene, of ‘syncretism’ but rather of a meeting between two religious and cultural worlds”) (Dunand 2006, 138). Note, however, that over the last decade often the case has been made for a rehabilitation of the concept for a number of different reasons. Such approaches are not so much concerned with syncretism as a description of a cultural phenomenon but, instead, with syncretisation as a process from a contemporary perspective. As such it seems to move into the direction of bricolage, for which see further below.



Figure 4.1 Persephone tomb, Kom el-Shoqafa necropolis, Alexandria. The painting shows an Egyptian funerary scene with Anubis and other Egyptian mortuary deities above and the Greek myth of the abduction of Persephone below.

If not syncretism, is it more useful then to describe the Antiochan style as bilingualism, as a double-style?⁵⁵ László Castiglione analysed this phenomenon for funerary art from Greco-Roman Egypt in a famous article from 1961.⁵⁶ Probably the best-known examples are paintings from the so-called Persephone tomb II in the Kom el-Shoqafa necropolis in Alexandria, dating from the first and second centuries AD. Two superimposed registers show an Egyptian funerary scene with Anubis and other Egyptian mortuary deities (above) and the Greek myth of the abduction of Persephone (below). (Fig. 4.1) Each register shows the style appropriate to its subject and, to quote Venit, “in a parallelism that is breathtakingly original, the myth in each register restates the theme of the other in parallel tripartite form as each presents a myth of death and resurrection specific to its own culture.”⁵⁷ Castiglione’s concept, however, is not often used and has been criticised on different grounds. Guimier-Sorbets and Seif el-Din remarked that what we have at Kom el-Shoqafa is not a double-style but

⁵⁵ Already *Allgöwer 1993* talks about bilingualism with regard to the Antiochan visual language.

⁵⁶ He defined it as “représentations dans lesquelles les personnages représentés, l’un dans le style égyptien, et l’autre dans le style gréco-romain figurant ensemble dans la même œuvre” (“representations in which the persons represented, one in the Egyptian style and the other in the Greco-Roman style, are appearing together in the same work”); *Castiglione 1961*, 211.

⁵⁷ *Venit 2002*, 146, also for all basic information on the tomb and a bibliography.

a juxtaposition of two different iconographies, while Riggs criticised the notion of a national style altogether – in this case Greek versus Egyptian – and urged scholars to think in terms of a system of representation.⁵⁸ Hence the concept does not seem particularly useful to describe the Antiochan style, in which we also see a juxtaposition of different elements as part of a system of representation.

Recent literature on the Antiochan style often uses the word “hybrid.”⁵⁹ It is indeed tempting to use this term in describing Antiochan Commagene because, as we have seen, the suggestion of inbetweenness is one of the main characteristics of the Antiochan project. Hybridity is a concept that is frequently employed nowadays within the social sciences and humanities, and archaeologists have been eager to use it to describe the “impure genres” that they encounter in material culture.⁶⁰ But what, exactly, does it mean? Originally a hybrid is a half-breed or a cross-breed, and is biologically defined as the off-spring of different species. Less specifically, it is understood as something of heterogeneous origin or composition or, in its most general form, a composite. It is the latter, general meaning that seems to be used most often in archaeology. This immediately raises one of the problems with using this word to describe a style of material culture, especially in the late Hellenistic period. What, on closer inspection, is not a composite in some way or another? Hybridity, in other words, suggests the existence of purity. This may work well for the biological determination of species, but it is highly problematical in understanding material culture. A more specific problem in the archaeological application of the term is that it often seems to imply a kind of biological *Verschmelzung* (“fusion”) of cultures. In this vein, Phoenician material culture has been interpreted as a cross-breed of the Near East, Egypt, Cyprus, Greece and local – in the same way as the Antiochan style has been interpreted as a half-breed of Greece and Persia. It has already been argued above – and it will be further illustrated below – that such a view is limited because it allows little

⁵⁸ Guimier-Sorbets/Seif el-Din 2001, 134; Riggs 2005, 8–10.

⁵⁹ See, for example, the quotes from Smith given in 1.2 and 3.5 and Fowler 2005, 128, which describes the style of the ancestor reliefs as “a sort of studiously hybrid quality.”

⁶⁰ For “impure genres” see Butcher 2003, Chapter 8 and Meyer 2013. Important general literature on hybridity includes Young 1995; Canclini 1995; Werbner/Modood 1997; Kapchan/Turner Strong 1999; and the short and useful overview Burke 2009. For its application within archaeology, see Antonaccio 2003; Van Dommelen 2006; and Mairs 2011. Important remarks on the feasibility of the concept for the study of the ancient Mediterranean from the perspective of vision as a culturally conditioned category of experience are in Papalexandrou 2010.

room for appropriation and agency. Therefore, as Nicolas Thomas put it already in 1996: “Hybridity is almost a good idea, but not quite.”⁶¹

It is therefore clear that the terms syncretism, double-style and hybridity all have their own disadvantages – mainly, I would argue, because they imply a fixed relation between style and ethnicity, or style and identity as a result of acculturation processes.⁶² I therefore propose to look for a more practical and applied terminology first. Depending on the object one looks at, the Antiochan style, in terms of its concrete and perceptible design, seems to be characterised by the juxtaposition of elements suggestive of different cultural traditions within a single monument – the Herakles *dexiosis* probably being the best example – or by an attempt at blending style and iconography of elements suggestive of different cultural traditions within a single monument, as with the colossal statues. Definitions, however, remain problematic. This seems largely due to the circumstance that the foreign types, styles and elements to be distinguished do *not* look as they are supposed to have looked in their original context⁶³ – hence the phrasing “elements *suggestive of* different cultural traditions within a single monument” above.

For Phoenician material culture, Katja Lembke has developed a practical and applied terminology to distinguish how a foreign object or style was received and dealt with in Phoenicia.⁶⁴ She talks about “addition” (imports from a foreign cultural context of which the function and meaning might change but might also stay the same), “modification” (changes are visible: the object is still recognisable as foreign but it is locally made and controlled), “transformation” (the emergence, through addition and modification, of a new type), “translation” (foreign types or styles are locally produced and used for reasons that have nothing to do with their original meaning) and “creation” (a new type or style that has lost its connection with its original, foreign prototype). This model, however, is impossible to apply to the Antiochan style. For example, the Herakles figure on the *dexiosis* reliefs could be described as modification – it is clearly recognisable as Greek, but was locally made and controlled – while the relief as a whole seems to be an example of transformation, as it is clearly a new

⁶¹ Thomas 1996, 9. As with syncretism/syncretisation, there is at present a large group of scholars trying to refine the concept of hybridity as hybridisation or hybrid practice – see Tronchetti 2005; Nederveen Pieterse 2009; Stewart 2011; and Stockhammer 2012.

⁶² See for this critique more extensively 1.2. The term “creolisation” (that I have not seen used within Commagene studies so far but that enjoyed a certain popularity within Roman studies after Webster 2001) falls prey to the same critique; see Stewart 2007.

⁶³ As rightly emphasised in Smith 1991, 227, concerning the ancestor relief showing Darius: “its ‘Achaemenid’ style and costume are purely fictional.”

⁶⁴ Lembke 2004, 1–10 with its Table 1.

type. At the same time, however, the Antiochan style in itself is clearly an example of creation. It seems, therefore, that something changed significantly from the Phoenician context to the late Hellenistic context, and that we are in need of a rather different model for the latter period. Central to the definition of this model should be the fact that what happens in Antiochan Commagene is a process of appropriation, made in a specific context for specific reasons.

This is why I propose to use the concept of bricolage. Originally formulated by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his *La pensée sauvage* from 1962 to analyse the combinations of mythical motifs, the term “bricolage” is now commonly used throughout a large number of scholarly disciplines to denote *how various influences and traditions are used to create a new whole*.⁶⁵ Already in antiquity such processes were defined and extensively discussed.⁶⁶ The Antiochan style, therefore, is best described as *a juxtaposition and blending of discrete elements suggestive of different cultural traditions within a single, new style as the result of a conscious appropriation*.⁶⁷ The term “bricolage” seems the most apt as a general characterisation of this process.⁶⁸ It is interesting to note that in fact

⁶⁵ See also Bastide 1970, which called it “la principe de coupure” (“the principle of cutting”), and, for examples of its current use, Mary 2000, Rao/Monin/Durand 2005, and Deuze 2006. For an evaluation of the concept as used within the social sciences, see Bernand/Capone/Lenoir/Champion 2001. In a more applied manner, the term “bricolage research” can be seen used in recent debates on how to do research with a large variety of theoretical paradigms at your disposal (doing research as bricolage); see Rogers 2012. Especially in entrepreneurship and innovation studies the literature on bricolage is immense.

⁶⁶ See, summarising, Perry 2005; Tanner 2005; and Anguissola 2012, with the classic paper by Preisshofen/Zanker 1970/71. These processes will be discussed more extensively below.

⁶⁷ It seems that Fergus Millar realised most of this already in 1987 when he evaluated Commagene in a short but succinct section of his article: “A combination of different cultural traditions is certainly expressed in the monuments and inscriptions of one local dynasty which emerged in north Syria in the second century, the royal house of Commagene. But if what we are interested in is a ‘local’ mixed culture, Commagene is not a true exception, for everything that we can observe there is, first, a royal invention; and, secondly, though the kings consciously draw on two traditions, they do so in relation to Greek and *Persian* elements, not Syrian or Aramaic ones: Greek gods and Ahuramazda; royal descent from Persia and Macedon; Persian dress to be worn at festivals. It was natural, in creating a new, royal ideology, to look to the two major monarchies of the Achaemenids and Seleucids. But there still is a contrast, for instance, with the contemporary coinage of the Hasmoneans in Judaea, which incorporates both Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic elements” (Millar 1987, 125).

⁶⁸ It is important to underline that bricolage is therefore a form of appropriation, for which see Ashley/Plech 2002, and the important works of Hahn 2004; Hahn 2005a, 100–110; and Hahn 2008. This is contra Andrade 2013, 344, which sees, mistakenly I think, bricolage as belonging to the domain of hybridity. Note however that in more general terms Andrade’s understanding of the Antiochan project as a performance of Greekness (Andrade 2013, Chapter 2) is very much in line with what I propose here.

Antiochos' great cult inscription itself already says the same thing, when it states that the king had his images (*eikones*) made "according to the ancient *logos* of the Persians and Hellenes."⁶⁹

4.2 What Is It That We Call Greek and Persian?

There are many other examples, in material culture, of the juxtaposition of discrete elements suggestive of different cultural traditions within a single monument through processes of modification and transformation. Already in the Bronze Age, there would have existed something like "an international, helleno-semitic, artistic *koine* of exotica and iconographica" in which Eastern and Western elements were put together.⁷⁰ Also Phoenician material culture is an amalgam of itself with, among other things, Greek and Persian elements.⁷¹ Achaemenid art was already characterised as "obvious eclectic" in the *Survey of Persian art* from 1938.⁷² This eclecticism of the Achaemenids – who made up their own style by a bricolage of forms and symbols of conquered peoples – has been well studied; especially the imperial residences Pasargadae and Persepolis have got ample attention.⁷³ (Fig. 4.2) It is clear that the borrowing of foreign styles and motives at the imperial residences was an active, dynastic choice related to identity building and to the display of power by the

⁶⁹ See the [Appendix](#).

⁷⁰ Knapp 1998, 198. Cf. also 205: "The growth of evidence throughout the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean for an artistic or ideological *koine* that revolved around the accumulation and substantiation of politico-economic power, and which was expressed in a variety of ideational and material exchanges, seems hard to deny." See furthermore Sherratt/Sheratt 1998, 329–343; Caubet 1998; and now Feldman 2006.

⁷¹ Stucky et al. 2005, 140 concludes on the Eschmun sanctuary at Sidon: "Die Verbindung heterogener – phönizischer, ägyptischer, kleinasiatischer, iranischer, griechischer – Komponenten zu einer eigenständigen Kunstrichtung mit ausgesprochenen eklektischer Zügen ist somit im vorhellenistischen Sidon nicht ungewöhnlich" ("The combination of heterogeneous Phoenician, Egyptian, Asia Minor, Iranian and Greek components into an independent direction of art with pronounced eclectic traits is therefore not unusual at pre-Hellenistic Sidon"). For these questions more in general, see Stucky 2001, Grainger 1992 and Lembke 2004.

⁷² Ackerman 1964/5, 389: "The obvious eclecticism of the Achaemenids, shown in their readiness to borrow from their conquered peoples external forms and symbols, is in danger of distinguishing the fact that in using these alien motifs they were not accepting alien ideas, but were merely enriching their artistic vocabulary, the better to express with more variety and vividness, the age-old conceptions that they had inherited from their forebears." For this important notion of a Persian *koine*, see recently Briant 2015, 177 with n. 16.

⁷³ Cf. Root 1979 (to be contrasted with Jacobs 2002a) and Boardman 2000. For an important case study on how all this worked "on the ground," see Dusinberre 2003.

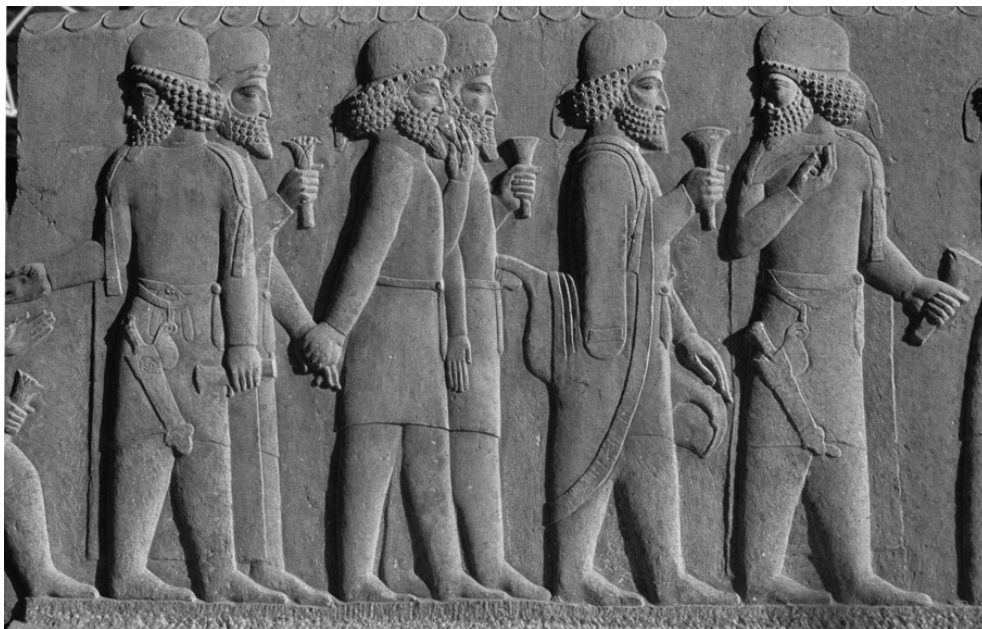


Figure 4.2 Relief from Persepolis showing dignitaries, Tripylon, east wing.

court.⁷⁴ Concluding, as the previous paragraph did, that we can speak of bricolage with Greek as well as Persian concepts in the case of Antiochos I therefore remains a rather descriptive and too general a conclusion because, as the few brief observations above already show, such processes of eclecticism applied in an active choice have many (earlier) parallels.

The Antiochan style has been defined above as a juxtaposition and blending of carefully selected elements suggestive of different cultural traditions, and was largely made up of (what we call) Greek and Persian “building blocks.” The remaining and most important question is therefore: What do the elements that are appropriated to make up this style actually mean and do?⁷⁵ What is it that we call Greek and Persian? Did Antiochos I really seek a Greco-Persian identity by juxtapositioning

⁷⁴ For this central power to be demonstrated by cultural polycentrism with the Achaemenids more in general, see *Briant 1987*.

⁷⁵ Cf. *Butcher 2003*, 283, which remarks that in such a situation our (remaining) task is “to differentiate between the different uses of the signs”: that is what this section sets out to do. Trying to understand the “Greek” and “Persian” elements of the Antiochan project as “signs” that were loaded with historical, cultural and political values recalls discussions on the development of Greek language under the Roman Empire and the use of Atticism versus Asianism. Although that discussion – inaugurated in *Von Willamowitz 1900*, 1–52 – is certainly important for the subject of this book, it is not directly relevant and was therefore left out of the debate. A fine summary with earlier literature can be found in *Whitmarsh 2005*, Chapter 3.

Greek and Persian elements, as the majority of scholars believe? Or should we understand the functioning of these elements in late Hellenistic Commagene in a rather different way?

4.2.1 Hellenisation, Hellenism and Diversities of Doing Greek

The question “what, precisely, is Greek?” has become one of the central debates in Greek, Hellenistic and Roman archaeology over the past decades – if it has not been a fundamental question for the discipline from its very beginnings. This section will only briefly chart a large discussion and therefore takes the three aspects of this book’s approach (as described in 1.2) as its central concern in order to try and explain what we mean when we say Greek in the context of late Hellenistic Commagene. To explore the many diversities of doing Greek in antiquity and their scholarly understanding, the concept of identity effectively serves as a point of departure.

Like all identities, Greek identity is discursively constructed. Jonathan Hall’s seminal book from 2002 demonstrated that the concepts of Greek and Greekness might well be some sort of construction that was only used in times of crisis, and mainly by the Athenians, as a constructed identity to respond to threats from the outside, such as the Persians.⁷⁶ This conclusion makes it difficult to talk about a Greek style of material culture in an ethnic sense because what we commonly call Greek is, in fact, Attic or Corinthian or Thessalian, etc. However, no one will deny that a style of material culture developed in the area commonly called *Magna Graecia* that had specific formal characteristics and has commonly been denominated as Greek. It is important to realise, then, that what we call Greek with regard to material culture is thus *not* a culture-style in the limited sense of that word: as a style related to a specific period or people. What we call Greek functioned in many wider Eurasian contexts, which it influenced and by which it was influenced. This process is commonly described as Hellenisation. Hellenisation therefore neither began with Alexander nor depended entirely on his conquests.⁷⁷ In the following Hellenistic and Roman periods, “the Greek” rapidly developed into a much used and polyvalent concept.⁷⁸ Hellenisation therefore

⁷⁶ Hall 2002. On the same problem see Dougherty/Kurke 2003 and Lund 2005. All publications provide ample earlier (sociological) literature.

⁷⁷ As already Millar 1987, 110.

⁷⁸ A general, diachrone perspective of this development is now available through the volume Zacharia 2008; note also Cartledge 1995. For “Greekness” as cultural strategy in the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods in particular, see Honigman 2007. Further literature is given in subsequent footnotes.

cannot be something like the results of the colonisation by ethnic Greeks of the Mediterranean and Near East – while it has also become clear that the spread of Hellenisation cannot be caused by the inherent superiority of Greek culture, as scholars of earlier generations often thought.⁷⁹ When we want to know what this Hellenisation then actually is, and in particular what it meant for Commagene, we are confronted with a problem that Fergus Millar, somewhat provocingly, described in regard to Syria as follows:

The first question is one of cultural identity. Can we observe elsewhere in Syria, i.e. outside Judaea, either the continued survival of a non-Greek culture, or the fusion (*Verschmelzung*) in Droysen's sense of Greek and non-Greek cultures? As I have argued elsewhere, there is perhaps just enough evidence to show that this was the case in the Phoenician cities of the coast. But elsewhere, with the exception of Judaea, we meet a problem which haunts one and all of the questions we would like to ask. If we are going to ask about the nature or limits of hellenisation, there is a prior question: the hellenisation of what? Whether we think of northern Syria, the Orontes valley, or Damascus, or present-day Jordan, we find that almost nothing is known, from either literary or documentary or archaeological evidence, about what these places were like in the Achaemenid period.⁸⁰

This does not imply, however, that it is impossible to say something more generally about the meaning of “the Greek” in our region. The first important point – an obvious one by now – is that it was not a matter of a superior culture bringing civilisation to a barbarian periphery.⁸¹ The second important point was made by Paul Veyne in a classic paper from 1979, wherein he argued that one had to distinguish between different Hellenisations. The first one he described as “international hellenism.” As an example, he provided the Etruscan artisans working in an international Mediterranean style: for

⁷⁹ Cf. *Funck* 1996. For an overview of the debate that deconstructed this paradigm as well as the formulation of alternatives, see *Hodos* 2014. Note that Hodos discards the term “Hellenisation” altogether and concludes: “In short, the widely shared common characteristics that developed across the Mediterranean during the Iron Age do not reflect Hellenisation, or Phoenicianisation, but broadly understood Mediterraneanisations tempered by strongly articulated localised identities.” Cf. the argument regarding intra-cultural connectivity in 1.2 above.

⁸⁰ *Millar* 1987, 111. Although this picture has been altered to some extent (see *Grainger* 1992 and now *Gatier* 2003, updating the available sources and providing greater nuance to the arguments made by Millar), it remains very important to ask the question “the Hellenisation of what?” – as the case of Commagene has again underlined.

⁸¹ As, for example, Mitchell (*Mitchell* 1999, 421) concluded on the Hellenisation of Pisidia: “What is important is that Hellenization in Pisidia was clearly not imposed by a foreign authority, but was chosen by the native population as a means of keeping up with the rest of Mediterranean society.” For the same pattern and principle in Pisidia in the Roman period see *Waelkens* 2002. For severe and just criticism on Hellenistic archaeology in this respect see already *Alcock* 1993a/b.

them a Greek style simply indicated that it was a luxury object to be decorated. Veyne argued that there was not really a cultural Other involved for these artisans and their consumers. We happen to call it Greek, but at the time such ethnic or cultural ideas did not come with the style.⁸² With the second type of Hellenisation, however, strong cultural value judgements were playing a role, seeing that, especially after Alexander, Hellenisation had become the equivalent of civilisation. To use Veyne's phrasing: now "acquiring civilisation implied Hellenisation" and in the Hellenistic period "Greek" simply indicated "civilisation."⁸³ Especially from the period of Alexander onwards, therefore, Hellenisation in our region is best studied not as an acculturation process between (dominant) Greeks and (passive) Orientals, but as an active choice made by rulers and societies around the Mediterranean and in the Near East. An active choice to demonstrate that they mattered; that they knew how to play the rules of the game; as a display of their cultural competence.⁸⁴ And this brings us to Hellenism.

The word *hellenismos* is first encountered in 2 *Maccabees* (4, 13), in which it seems to have been used rhetorically, as a metaphor for the "other" – in this case the non-Jewish – way. In dealing with the invention of Hasmonean kingship in [Chapter 3](#), Rajak's work was referred to as drawing a distinction between *Hellenisation* – understood as an acculturation process – and *Hellenism* – understood as the conscious adoption of Greek ways by active agents due to political or religious significance.⁸⁵ In the case of Hellenism, the main question therefore is: why was a Greek element or style consciously adopted and used? A spate of recent publications has provided many possible answers on "Hellenism as a source of social power" over time.⁸⁶ In western Anatolia it was used by dynasts like

⁸² Veyne 1979, 6–9: "Entre les imitateurs et les imités, les relations restaient extérieures, sans dialectique de fascination, d'inégalité et de ressentiment." In fact this is the "objective understanding" of style as stylistics or design, as discussed above.

⁸³ Veyne 1979, 10: "se civiliser voulait dire s'helléniser"; and 16: "la civilisation tout court."

⁸⁴ In a similar vein for instance Gatier 2003, 112–113. Gatier defined cultural influences on the small, rural sanctuary of Massakeb dating from circa 100 BC as "d'influences que je dirai <grecques> ou plutôt <modernisatrices>" ("influences that I will call 'Greek' or rather 'modernisations'"). For the Hellenism of the Seleucid and Ptolemaic royal courts, see Strootman 2011 (with further references). For concepts of Greekness in the Hellenistic period more in general, see now Stavrianopoulou 2013.

⁸⁵ For Hellenism in a Maccabean context see furthermore Hengel 1988; Will/Orrieux 1986; Cohen 1990; Gruen 1998; Collins/Sterling 2001; and Honigman 2014. For the theoretical background see Kuhrt/Sherwin-White 1987 and Friedman 1990, 14–39.

⁸⁶ For the phrasing see Butcher 2003, 273. A recent introduction to this question, with several essays on specific contexts as they are mentioned here, is Porter 2006: an exploration of the meanings of the concept "Classical" in the Greek and Roman periods. Other important literature on the concept of Hellenism and its applications include: Bowersock 1990 and 2008;

Mausollos to explore and suggest connections to an Athenian past.⁸⁷ In the Hellenistic world it served to overcome the cultural dislocation of an elite that was educated in the Greek tradition in some contexts; in other contexts it was a way of sharing the new life-style.⁸⁸ In the Roman world the use of a Greek style expressed proximity to – or alternatively distance and autonomy from – the many faces of the cultural concept of Greece.⁸⁹ In the Second Sophistic it is thought to have articulated local identity and resistance towards Rome by some scholars.⁹⁰ In late antiquity it expressed newly defined paganism.⁹¹ And in post-antique periods its possible meanings proliferated in even more various and multiple directions.⁹²

Our conclusion must be that, in the first century BC, Greek elements generally had little to do with acculturation processes in which (ethnic) Greeks were directly involved. It is equally unlikely that they can be used to measure the relative Hellenisation – or Greekness – of a society. With regard to first-century BC Commagene: we do not know if there were Greeks or people claiming to be Greek in Antiochan Commagene. At that very same time, however, the cultural history of Hellenism was already well underway and Greek had already developed into one of the most powerful symbols to make meaning with. The deployment, within the Antiochan project, of elements suggestive of the cultural tradition Greek therefore primarily has to be understood as an active choice to associate with civilisation and modernity. What we have in Antiochan Commagene is Hellenism, not Hellenisation or anything related to ethnic concepts of Greekness. As eloquently put by Butcher, with regard to Roman Syria:⁹³

Hellenism was a powerful influence in the region during the period of Roman rule and an important tool for constructing communities. It was certainly not simply a façade masking another reality, and nor should it be seen as an influence

Swain 1996; Gruen 1984 and 1998; Frankfurter 2000; Török 2005; Kaldellis 2007; and Honigman 2014. I also profited from Champion 2004 and several pieces in Hardwick/Stray 2008.

⁸⁷ See 3.5.

⁸⁸ See the overview in Burnstein 2003 and, from a different perspective, Moyer 2011.

⁸⁹ Vogt-Spira 1996; Vogt-Spira/Rommel/Musäus 1999; Dupont/Valette-Cagnac 2005; Huet/Valette-Cagnac 2005; Wallace-Hadrill 2008.

⁹⁰ For an overview of the discussion and the main concepts see Whitmarsh 2005 and Konstan/Saïd 2006.

⁹¹ Bowersock 1990.

⁹² Illustrative of, and fundamental for, the approach advocated here is Goldhill 2002 and, with regard to a specific historical period, the overview volumes Heinen 2011.

⁹³ Butcher 2003, 332. Note that his Roman Syria starts in 64 BC and that in antiquity Commagene was considered to be a part of Syria (see 2.2). His conclusion is therefore directly applicable to Antiochan Commagene.

that somehow contaminated the cultural “purity” of indigenous identities. It did, however, have much to do with power, with social standing and with Roman imperialism.

4.2.2 Persianism in the Ancient World

It is telling that, after looking at the meaning and use of the “Greek” element under the heading of Hellenism, we cannot use the same linguistic construction for a similar overview of the meaning and use of the “Oriental” element. Orientalism has come to denote something very different.⁹⁴ However, for Classical archaeologists in particular it is interesting to regard Hellenism and Orientalism as processes that work in similar ways. “The Orient” was used, manipulated and represented in specific periods and areas – and in order to attain particular goals – in much the same way that Greece and the idea of Hellas were.⁹⁵ If we confine ourselves to the Antiochan style, the question to be explored here is therefore how the Persian element was understood, taken up and used over time, and how we can explain its appropriation by Antiochos I as a result of this development. The [previous section](#) has illustrated and concluded that there clearly is something like Hellenism, but can we also speak about Persianism?⁹⁶

In fifth-century BC Athens, Persians and Persian elements are used as negative stereotypes of “the Other.” Such processes of Othering can be abundantly illustrated from literary sources, but also on *ostraka*; for instance, candidates to be exiled were characterised as “Mede” (Persian).⁹⁷ Othering, however, was only one out of many more options to make meaning with

⁹⁴ See Said 1978. The afterword and preface as printed in the twenty-fifth anniversary edition from 2003 provide an overview of the discussion on the book and its thesis. Useful reflections on the concept and its (mis)understanding are in Hussein 2002. For Said and Classics and the usefulness of the concept of Orientalism for understanding processes of culture contact in the Hellenistic and Roman world more in general, see Versluys 2013b with earlier bibliography.

⁹⁵ See the important volume *Debating Orientalization* edited by Riva and Vella (Riva/Vella 2006). A more applied analysis of similar problems can be found in Prayon/Rollig 1997.

⁹⁶ This question has not yet been given the attention it deserves. Important remarks and observations on aspects of the problem can already be found in Root 1991; Curtis 2007; Harrison 2010; Tuplin 2010; Wiesehöfer 2011; and Daryaei 2012. The volume Strootman/Versluys 2017 now provides an in-depth discussion of the concept as well as an overview of many examples from a much wider variety of contexts and perspectives than this section does. I therefore refer to that book with its rich bibliography for what I only briefly summarise here, also for the difference and overlap between Persian and Iranian.

⁹⁷ See Hall 2002, 199. For the place of Persia in Athenian literature see Tuplin 1996, Chapter 3 and the recent monograph by L. Mitchell 2007. For processes of “Othering” in the ancient world in general, see Rosen/Sluiter 2010.

Persia. In the same period, there were powerful Persianisms everywhere. Athenian elites, for instance, liked to dress up in Persian style at certain occasions.⁹⁸ It does not surprise, therefore, that Jewish sources from the same period seem to be rather positive about Persian kingship in their turn – in particularly about Cyrus, who ended their Babylonian exile.⁹⁹ Concerning the influence of the Persian model on styles of material culture in areas under their control, it is rather the absence of this influence that is striking. Of course, it did exist, but most scholars emphasise that its implications seem to have been limited, especially when compared to the success of the Greek element.¹⁰⁰

In the world of the Hellenistic royal courts of the Diadochoi, Persian elements can be expected to suggest continuity with the previous Achaemenid rulers.¹⁰¹ The Achaemenid Empire was the largest empire the world had seen so far – and one of the first with the pretension of truly being a world empire.¹⁰² This was an attractive model to follow; also because Alexander had strongly associated himself with it. The large symposium tent from Ptolemy II, for instance, known to us by a description of Kallixeinos, contained clear Persian references, probably to underline dynastic legitimacy.¹⁰³ It is important to note that the Seleucids did *not* use references to the Persians for this reason.¹⁰⁴ Although their enemies sometimes even characterised them as “the new Persians,” the Seleucids did not present themselves as such. Is this because their position was already sufficiently legitimated?¹⁰⁵ This clearly was not the case for the many kingdoms and principalities that functioned under the Seleucid umbrella and slowly started to fill the vacuum it left. The Frataraka rulers of Fārs, for instance, used quasi-traditional coin images and Achaemenid

⁹⁸ See in general still the splendid study *Miller 1997* as well as *Root 1991* and *Root 1994*; both now with *Tuplin 2007*.

⁹⁹ At the same time, however, close reading might reveal “a more cynical and subversive stance” whereby the real message would be Jewish intellectual and moral authority over the Persians; see *Gruen 2005b*.

¹⁰⁰ See the important study *Jacobs 1987*; the conclusions in *Dentzer-Feydy 1989*; several articles in *Bakır 2001*; *Dusinberre 2003*. For Phoenicia: *Lembke 2004* and *Stucky et al. 2005*; for the Black Sea region: *Nieling/Rehm 2010*.

¹⁰¹ As also did Alexander the Great himself. For conceptions of the East in this period more in general see *Teixidor 1990*. The overview presented in *Strootman/Versluis 2017* strongly suggests that it is in this context that the concept of Persianism really takes off.

¹⁰² Cf. *Axworthy 2007*, Chapter 1 and *Strootman 2013a*.

¹⁰³ This description has been preserved in *Athenaios V*, 196–203; cf. *Pfrommer 1999*, 75 with, however, a somewhat differing interpretation that sees it as a conscious appropriation to show the superiority of Macedonian pharaohs over the East. See in general *Parlasca 1979*.

¹⁰⁴ See *Austin 2003*, 128 and, most recently, the studies by *Strootman (2013a and c)*.

¹⁰⁵ This important question is key to several of the contributions in *Strootman/Versluis 2017*.



Figure 4.3 Silver tetradrachm showing a Frataraka ruler wearing the *kyrbasia*, the typical Persian satrapal headdress.



Figure 4.4 Silver drachm of Arsakes I. Obverse: portrait of Arsakes wearing the satrapal headdress called *kyrbasia*. Reverse: the king wearing *kyrbasia* and *kandys* and holding a bow.

titulature; as such they styled themselves almost as “neo-Achaemenid.” (Fig. 4.3) This will have shown that they were vassals to the Seleucids, but emphasising real or imagined links with the Achaemenids will simultaneously have reinforced their political claims and (socio-political) stature. This is also clear in the Parthian world. For Parthian royal ideology, for instance, the Achaemenid inheritance was of crucial importance.¹⁰⁶ This might again have been born from a need for legitimation: in some respects, the Parthians wanted to be seen as *the* heirs of the Achaemenids. (Fig. 4.4) In the middle and late Hellenistic Mediterranean and Near East, therefore, references to Persia and the Achaemenid Empire often seem to be a form of Persianism, which can be defined as *ideas and associations revolving around Persia and appropriated in specific contexts for specific (socio-cultural or socio-political) reasons*. Persianism, therefore, is

¹⁰⁶ See Fowler 2005; much more critical and reticent in this respect is Bruno Jacobs in Hackl/Jacobs/Weber 2010, I, 77–111. Most recently on this question Canepa 2017, which maintains that “Arsakes thus created a new independent image of royal power that used certain archaic Achaemenid forms to directly challenge the Seleukids.” Parthian royal ideology and its Persianism will be discussed in more detail in 4.3.

a construction of cultural memory in the context of new and varied, post-Achaemenid political and cultural contexts, like Antiochan Commagene, and a convenient shorthand to understand various forms of reception of, and references to, the Achaemenid Empire in antiquity that are distinct from direct Achaemenid (cultural) influence.¹⁰⁷

For the Romans, the Persians no longer existed as a cultural and political antipode as they had for the Athenians. In Roman literature and visual material culture, however, the contemporary Parthians were frequently portrayed as Persians.¹⁰⁸ The cultural identity of the East was perceived as encompassing both in this period: the legacy of the Persians as well as that of Alexander the Great. With the Parthians being the new Persians, the Romans could claim the inheritance of Alexander for themselves. The Parthian self-presentation as Persian therefore accommodated both sides: the Parthians could present themselves as heirs to the Achaemenids, while the Romans styled themselves as heirs to Alexander the Great – the opponent and conqueror of the Achaemenids – simultaneously.¹⁰⁹ But more meaning was made with Persia in the Roman period. With the very popular cult of Mithras, for instance, all kinds of stereotypes of Oriental Otherness were played out to make Mithras a special and attractive option within the Roman religious system. There are many references to Persia in the cult of Mithras, but if we look closely we see that these are in fact all references to Roman ideas about Persia. (Fig. 4.5) This goes so far that even the god Mithras himself, as most scholars now believe, is probably an invented tradition dating to the Hellenistic and Roman periods.¹¹⁰

Again, different forms of Persianism are visible with the Sasanians; often these seem to function as “technologies of memory.”¹¹¹ As with Hellenism, Persianism was used as a source of social power in post-antique periods as well: sometimes as Orientalism, other times as something very different. When in the second half of the fifth century AD a certain Gobazes, king of

¹⁰⁷ Also of relevance is the concept of “Iranism” and the related idea of the political and cultural unity of Greater Iran which was introduced in late antiquity by the Sassanian dynasty as their concept of empire. Several articles in *Strootman/Versluys 2017* suggest that “Iran” is in origin a concept of the eastern Iranian world that later travelled to the west, while “Persia” originally is a Mediterranean and West-Iranian concept that travelled to the east. Persianism, therefore, seems to be the concept most appropriate for Antiochan Commagene.

¹⁰⁸ For the Roman view of the Parthians, see *Schneider 1998*, 95–146 with ample earlier bibliography and now also *Lerouge 2007*.

¹⁰⁹ See *Fowler 2005*, 129; *Schneider 2007*, 50–86; and *Lerouge 2007*. Note, however, the critical view by Bruno Jacobs in *Hackl/Jacobs/Weber 2010*, I, 77–111.

¹¹⁰ See *Gordon 2007*, 392–405 and his contribution to *Strootman/Versluys 2017* as well as *Versluys 2013b*, 248–250.

¹¹¹ To use the terminology of *Canepa 2010b*. See also *Roaf 1988* and *Daryaei 2012*.



Figure 4.5 A Persian-looking Mithras slaying the bull. Marble relief from Rome (CIL VI 735).

Lazica, visits the Byzantine emperor Leo I, he is dressed in Persian attire in an attempt to impress: apparently the Achaemenid imperial model had a strong and longlasting allure.¹¹² But to give a very different example: from around the sixth century AD onwards Syriac culture would style itself by what is called “assyrianisation.” This implies that Christians living in Mesopotamia would make sense of their history and identity by looking at the Assyrians, seeing that they were portrayed in the Bible as their ancestral model: they did *not* want to be the new Persians.¹¹³ There are many post-antique Persianisms as well. One can think here of the appropriation of Oriental and typically Persian styles and motifs in Venice and Venetian material culture, in order to construct a novel civic identity.¹¹⁴ A recent example of Persianism, finally, is the evocation of Achaemenid grandeur by the last shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, at the 2500-year anniversary of Iranian monarchy that was held at Persepolis in 1971.

Though brief, this overview of Persianism in antiquity has strongly suggested an explanation for the employment of the Persian element in Antiochan Commagene. In the context of the Antiochan project, the use of styles and elements referring to the Achaemenids is probably best

¹¹² See Fowden 1993, 1–4 and the introduction to Strootman/Versluys 2017.

¹¹³ For this example see Becker 2008.

¹¹⁴ See Howard 2000 and the exhibition catalogue Carboni 2006.

understood as a typically post-Seleucid, late Hellenistic form of Persianism. Especially in the eastern Mediterranean and Parthian Near East there are many parallels for such a strategy, which mainly seems to have served as an active form of dynastic legitimization. Two most illustrative examples from the same period underline this interpretation. First there is the allocution held by Mithridates of Pontus before he confronted Rome, on the eve of the first Mithridatic War in 89 BC. This is how Justin (38.7.1), in indirect speech, presents us with it:

Suppose, he continued, that he was compared with the Romans in terms of breeding. He was superior to that motley rabble of refugees since he could trace his line back on his father's side to Cyrus and Darius, the founders of the Persian empire, and on his mother's side to Alexander the Great and Seleukos Nikator, founders of the Macedonian empire.

This is literally what Antiochos I also claims at Nemrud Dağ, some decades later. A second parallel informs us even more explicitly about the involvement of related objects and styles with such claims. In 34 BC, a royal Ptolemaic ritual took place known as the Donations of Alexandria.¹¹⁵ In a public ceremony Mark Antony promised Cleopatra rulership over the entire Hellenistic East.¹¹⁶ Plutarch provides us with a description of what the ceremony looked like – the children of Mark Antony and Cleopatra played an important role to underline the dynastic genealogy – and how the different, in this case Macedonian, Greek, Egyptian and Persian, cultural scenarios were played out:¹¹⁷

Alexander was brought out before the people in the Median costume, the tiara and upright peak, and Ptolemy, in boots and mantle and Macedonian cap done about with the diadem; for this was the habit of the successors of Alexander, as the other was of the Medes and the Armenians. And, as soon as they had saluted their parents, the one was received by a guard of Macedonians, the other by one of Armenians. Cleopatra was then, as at other times when she appeared in public, dressed in the habit of the goddess Isis, and gave audience to the people under the name of the New Isis.

¹¹⁵ For all information on this “landmark in the development of the Roman Near East,” an overview of scholarly opinions and a novel interpretation, see now *Strootman 2010*.

¹¹⁶ *Strootman 2010*: “The ceremony was fashioned as a coronation ritual. The ritual language employed was based on Hellenistic, particularly Seleukid tradition, while the material symbolism, the pomp and the regalia, came from contemporary Ptolemaic court culture, with some important distinctions, notably the use of Iranian regalia for Alexandros Helios and Kleopatra's appearance as Isis.”

¹¹⁷ Plutarch, *Lives, Antony*, Ch. 54. Cf. *Swain 1990*. For the bronze statues in Baltimore and New York (and related material) that might represent Alexander Helios in Persian attire as described by Plutarch, see the essay *Rolley 2006*, 165–168.



Figure 4.6 Bronze statue of, probably, Alexander, son of Cleopatra, in Persian costume, posing like a Parthian or Armenian prince.

As with the Antiochan visual language, the Persian regalia served here to claim legitimacy as ruler of the East and to capitalise on the prestige of the Achaemenids. Bronze statues found in Egypt and now preserved in museums in New York and Baltimore (Fig. 4.6) show a child dressed up like a Parthian or Armenian prince and might refer to this occasion.

4.3 Three Case Studies on Bricolage in the First Century BC

It has been concluded above in rather general terms that the Antiochan visual language used Greek and Persian styles and elements to communicate both Hellenism and Persianism. The visual strategy of Antiochos I was thus not about *being* Greek and Persian but about *doing* Greek and Persian. It was shown that both strategies were rather common in the ancient world during the second part of the first millennium BC and, therefore, that these appropriations had built up a long cultural biography by the time they were applied in Antiochan Commagene. This is a crucial

point.¹¹⁸ Doing Greek and Persian was certainly not an Antiochan invention. Its combination in this particular way might perhaps be called original (see below), but the use of the concepts itself certainly was not. This implies that in understanding the Antiochan style we should not so much focus on Hellenism and Persianism per se, but on their applications in contexts around late Hellenistic Commagene. A final step towards a proper interpretation of the Antiochan bricolage, therefore, is to look for contemporary parallels – roughly from the first century BC – that demonstrate stylistic eclecticism.¹¹⁹ Which elements are shown in those examples? How are they put together? What do they do and why are they used? And what about the juxtapositioning and blending within the Antiochan project from that broader perspective?

It is not uncommon for eclecticism to be considered a symptom of creative exhaustion and (socio-cultural) stagnation. Eclectic styles are therefore often interpreted as (historical) evidence of cultural decline, as they would not be something “genuine.”¹²⁰ This criticism has been applied to subjects as diverse as Antiochan Commagene, Roman visual material culture and postmodernism.¹²¹ Hellenistic and Roman sources, however, clearly show that, in regard to literature at least, eclecticism was highly valued in antiquity. Ancient theories on literary eclecticism argue that in fact it is a bad idea to imitate one model only. Imitation in itself is a perfectly feasible strategy and, moreover, the ideal way to do it is a seamless blending of various models into one harmonious result.¹²² For the Roman context in particular it has been argued that using foreign

¹¹⁸ Cf. *Versluys 2013a*, 436: “Does this imply that every style we find used in the Late Republic was a conscious appropriation of a specific stage in the biography of a cultural scenario on the part of the user or consumer?”

¹¹⁹ Eclecticism is here defined as the employment of two or more models, subject types or period styles; cf. *Perry 2005*, Ch. IV (with abundant bibliography) as well as *Epron 1997* and *Lehmann/Petri 2012*.

¹²⁰ To briefly characterise this way of thinking: a proper culture (or cultural period) would develop its proper style – and in a superior culture, like Classical Greece, a superior one – and if this were not the case there clearly would be something wrong; see also the introductory remarks on the historiography of the concept of style at the beginning of this chapter. Cf. *Butcher 2003*, 278–279: “We tend to celebrate cultural integrity and difference, rather than undifferentiated hybrids, but cultures often refuse to be pigeonholed so easily.”

¹²¹ Within Roman studies this paradigm is now being deconstructed in the discussion about Roman copying, that tries to replace the “copy myth” with concepts like “emulation.” This view has a lot in common with the approach advocated in this book for Antiochan material culture. Important recent literature includes: *Gazda 2002*; *Perry 2005*; *Hallett 2005a*; *Hallett 2005b*; several articles in *Porter 2006*; *Trimble/Elsner 2006*; *Marvin 2008*; *Junker/Stähli 2008* (with useful criticism on the “new orthodoxy” established by the works just quoted); *Trimble 2011*; *Anguissola 2012*; and, in general, the work by T. Hölscher, for which see below.

¹²² *Perry 2005*, 112.

models in this way (also) provided a sense of command and power over the foreign Other.¹²³ Marcus Fabius Quintilianus – a rhetor who lived from circa 30 to circa AD 100 and wrote a handbook of his profession at the end of his life – is an important and much discussed source in this respect.¹²⁴ But he clearly represents and canonises a much wider and older socio-cultural characteristic of the Hellenistic-Roman world. Quintilian praised Cicero for his *imitatio* of the Greeks and recommended that dependence on a single prototype should be avoided. Through a careful choice – and by making use of the best elements of a range of prototypes – one could produce something new that surpassed any single model while still standing in the tradition of those same models.¹²⁵ Moreover, Quintilian comments on the meaning of these elements when he classifies sculpture styles in terms of the rhetorical distinction between *res* (what to say) and *verba* (how to put it). The importance of the relation between what to say and how to put it has already become clear above in discussing the diversities of doing Greek and Persian – it will be further elaborated below in three case studies on bricolage in the first century BC.

4.3.1 *Mixtum Compositum*: Material Culture in Late Republican and Augustan Rome

With regard to Roman visual material culture, Tonio Hölscher has studied processes of eclecticism and appropriation in a range of articles and books. He described the Roman use of styles as a semantic system in which specific themes and styles were used to evoke specific associations.¹²⁶ The so-called

¹²³ Momigliano 1975, 38. For the use of conceptual distance as a resource for socio-political power more in general, see Helms 1988.

¹²⁴ See Clarke 1996; Dominik 1997; Von Albrecht 1997, 1254–1264; volumes 2 and 3 of the journal *Rhetorica. A journal of the history of rhetoric* from 1995; and Grüner 2004, 76–83. For Quintilian as representative of a Hellenistic-Roman tradition, see, for instance, Wiater 2011.

¹²⁵ Cf. Perry 2005, 149: “Far from being symptomatic of creative failure, then, eclecticism provided the artist with a strategy for balancing the familiar with the innovative, with the intended result a work of art uniquely suited to a specific social, cultural or physical context. Eclecticism allowed the artist both to link with tradition and to carry it further”; and McElduff 2012.

¹²⁶ He first summarised his approach in Hölscher 1987; now translated into English, as *The language of images in Roman art*. For a characterisation of his ideas see J. Elsner’s introduction to the English translation and, lastly, Hölscher 2006. Hölscher’s central idea can be found summarised in a quote from *Die griechische Klassik* (Maischberger 2002, 627): “Ausgangspunkt ist die Feststellung, daß es sich um eine Zeit handelt, in der die Stile verschiedener Zeiten (Archaik, Klassik, Hellenismus) zur Verfügung standen. Seit dem Hellenismus erhielt die Wahl eines Stils die Funktion, bei dem Betrachter bestimmte Assoziationen hervorzurufen” (“The point of departure is the recognition that this was a time



Figure 4.7 Ahenobarbus relief, detail of the side in an Italic/Roman veristic style, showing a sacrifice to Mars, c. 100–80 BC.

altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus – a large votive base consisting of several rectangular reliefs, dating to circa 100–80 BC and already introduced in 1.1 (Figs. 1.3 and 1.4) – effectively illustrates this principle.¹²⁷ Some pieces show a marine *thiasos* with the wedding of Poseidon and Amphitrite (Fig. 1.4); others display an offering scene that is generally interpreted as the Roman ceremony of the *census*. (Fig. 1.3 and Fig. 4.7) The style and subject matter of these reliefs seem to bear no relationship to each other.¹²⁸ We do not know what the monument originally looked like, nor do we know who erected it, in what period, or for what reason. Most scholars currently agree that the reliefs should be dated to circa 100–80 BC, and reconstruct a rectangular-shaped monument – with the *thiasos* on three sides and the *census* on the fourth – which probably served as a kind of votive base erected by a magistrate. The reliefs are believed to differ in quality – the *thiasos* being superior – and to have come from different workshops. The decorated votive base is a literal illustration of Hölscher’s semantic system, in which specific themes are related to specific visual languages.

when the styles of different periods were available: Archaic, Classical, Hellenistic. From the Hellenistic period onwards, the choice of a particular style received the function to invoke certain associations in the viewer”. Elsewhere (Hölscher 2000), he has characterised this as “bildliche Präsenz” (“image-presence”). For contemporary sources on the impact and associations of specific styles, see Prioux 2007/2008.

¹²⁷ For the monument see Kuttner 1993 and the monograph Stilp 2001 with all further previous literature. The monument (and its dating) continues to be debated; see recently Lohmann 2009, 109–122.

¹²⁸ This is one of the reasons why the reliefs ended up in two different locations: the *thiasos* is now in Munich; the *census* in Paris. They previously decorated the palazzo Santacroce in Rome from the end of the seventeenth century; their archaeological context is unknown.

A “Hellenistic baroque style” is used for the mythological subject of the marine *thiasos*, while the public and historical event of the *census* is displayed in a “Roman veristic style.”¹²⁹ How have other scholars accounted for the juxtaposition of two such different styles and themes within a single monument? Florian Stilp has suggested that the reliefs were originally part of a sculpture base found outside the temple of Neptune in Rome. This connection to Neptune would explain the presence of the marine *thiasos*; the *census* would have evoked a general feeling of *pietas*. Zanker argued that the *thiasos* served to suggest that the magistrate’s family descended from Poseidon, and that it was made in the eastern Mediterranean to be re-used on the Italic peninsula as *spolium*. He concluded that the combination of an official and religious Roman ritual with naked Nereids in a public monument must have been irritating to the viewer.¹³⁰ Gruen, on the other hand, argued that this dichotomy was looked for deliberately: the contrast would help to underline how distinctive and reassuringly Roman the *census* section is.¹³¹ With all these opinions ethnicity and identity seem to be the underlying concepts of the interpretation of what are understood as Greek/Hellenistic and Roman culture-styles in the limited sense of the word; wrongly so, as Hölscher’s work has demonstrated.¹³²

The example of the so-called altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus – and there are many other examples showing the same principle – suggests that Quintilian’s conclusions on eclecticism are characteristic for Hellenistic-Roman culture as a whole and already were for a long time. For styles and themes of material culture, this eclecticism even functioned as a truly semantic system from the period of circa 200 BC onwards, if we follow Hölscher. In looking for the (socio-political) reasons behind this system of eclecticism, most scholarly attention has focused on the Augustan period.¹³³ After having become emperor, Augustus made such deliberate and frequent use of the “Classical Greek style” that the Augustan visual language was characterised as classicistic – and the period itself as one of

¹²⁹ For the invention of the stylistic qualification “Hellenistic baroque” in late-nineteenth-century Germany in Von Salis 1912 – a fascinating interaction of archaeology, art history, architecture, politics and aesthetics – see Payne 2008 and Oechslin 2011.

¹³⁰ Zanker 1987, 22–24. For Zanker the monument as a whole clearly illustrated the “Desintegration der Führungsschicht” (“disintegration of the leading class”) that characterised the “gesellschaftlicher Auflösungsprozeß” (“disintegration process of society”) of the late Republic.

¹³¹ Gruen 1992, 145–152. ¹³² For this debate in more general terms, see De Angelis 2008.

¹³³ Not without reason; cf. Hölscher 2006, 239: “Among all the periods of Roman history, that of Augustus was oriented toward cultural models from Greece to an especially high degree.”



Figure 4.8 Detail of the procession frieze from the *Ara Pacis* in a strongly classicising style.

classicism.¹³⁴ (Fig. 4.8) Classicism can be defined as the emulation of an earlier set of visual styles.¹³⁵ In the case of Augustus and his cultural revolution, scholars have argued that this classicism was a form of appropriation that served important socio-political goals. Augustus would deliberately have appropriated an archaising, classicistic style – amongst other styles and cultural references – in order to make it part of his dynastic project of imperial ideology.¹³⁶ As similar principles have been shown to take place with the bricolage of the Antiochan style, it is important to look at why Augustus did so and to see whether this Augustan “looking back” can be compared to what happened in Antiochan Commagene.

¹³⁴ See the classic study Zanker 1974 and, to give but one recent example, Trofimova 2006. Recent research now begins to understand Augustan classicism as including more than “Classical Greek” alone; see Platt 2009 and Van Eck/Versluys/ter Keurs 2015, 9–15.

¹³⁵ For definitions see Borbein 1973, Porter 2006 (for the Augustan period see the articles by A. Stewart, T. Hölscher and J. Elsner in that book). See also Ellinger 2006, 239–242; the essay Eastmond/Stewart 2006, 75–81; and recently Wiater 2011.

¹³⁶ Fundamental still is Zanker 1987 which, in discussing the conception of temples and other public buildings under Augustus as a display of *maiestas imperii* (“imperial majesty”), characterises these stylistically as *mixtum compositum* (“mixed composition”) (256). For these processes in Rome more in general, note the articles Kuttner 1995 and Platt 2009.



Figure 4.9 Augustus of Prima Porta.

As an illustrative example of Augustan classicism and its socio-political meaning, scholars often refer to the portrait statue of the emperor that has been found at Livia's villa in Prima Porta.¹³⁷ (Fig. 4.9) The Augustus from Prima Porta is a new type of portrait statue that was created at the beginning of the Principate and that was remarkably different from the veristic Republican tradition. Its resemblances to the Doryphoros of Polykleitos – a monument from fifth-century BC Classical Greece – have long been recognised; the head in particular is very comparable. With the Doryphoros, Polykleitos wanted to represent the highest ideal of the citizen of the Classical polis. Until recently most scholars assumed that through its *imitatio* of the Doryphoros type, the Prima Porta statue type would have referred to these ideals about the Classical Greek polis. By presenting himself as a classical hero of Greek polis democracy, Augustus would

¹³⁷ See, out of an abundant bibliography, Zanker 1987, 192–196; Pollini 1995; Galinsky 1996, 155–164; and, most recently and importantly, Squire 2013, all with earlier literature. Interesting new observations are found in Van den Hengel 2009. What follows is largely based on the line of argument put forward in Hölscher 2006, especially pp. 242–244.

have wanted to illustrate the break he personified with the Republican warlords, who represented themselves as Hellenistic monarchs instead. Scholars ascribing to this analysis thus assume that Augustus used a Classical Greek style to claim Classical Greek qualities. Hölscher has criticised this interpretation for good reason. Firstly, he argued, there is the viewer: we should question whether the viewer would have had the Polykleitan Doryphoros in mind and, moreover, if he or she would have noted the resemblances as modern scholars do. Instead, Hölscher argued secondly, it is more likely that only the general stylistic forms of Classical Greek art would have been recognised – and even then by a highly cultured minority alone. The large majority of Roman viewers, therefore, would not have explicitly recognised the stylistic forms as fifth-century BC Classical Greek or as referring to polis ideas at all. For this majority, Hölscher argued subsequently, the style would have been a reminder of the *virtus* of warriors and athletes and of the *gravitas* of important persons. The style thus would have communicated something of a religious aura. Hölscher's conclusion – that the historical origins of this and other Greek styles played no essential role in their semantic communication – is worth quoting in full:

A crucial point is that such messages could be understood without knowledge of the historical origin of these stylistic forms and, as a rule, undoubtedly were understood without this kind of historical education. The dimension of the past is at most implicit in this, not explicit. It plays no appreciable role for the meaning of the portrait; indeed, it would be hard to understand the possible meaning of a retrospective reference to the full flowering of democracy in the tiny Greek city-states in the programmatic portrait of the first Roman autocrat of a world-encompassing empire. The represented qualities of the emperor signify nothing retrospective but relate purely to the present. The cultural memory of an authoritative past, whose values are to be conjured up and brought back into currency, is not discernible here.¹³⁸

In this view, styles were taken from a reservoir of possibilities available to express contemporary concepts. The various styles were historically contingent, but they were not used to directly appeal to a specific historical period.¹³⁹ Not only were these semantic elements – as they should be

¹³⁸ Hölscher 2006, 243–244. Zanker (Zanker 1987, 252) formulates this principle as follows: “Die klassischen Formen hobten das dargestellte Geschehen in einen auratischen Raum, der die gewünschten Vorstellungen hervorrufen sollte” (“The classical forms elevated the represented topics into an ‘auratic realm,’ which should invoke the desired imaginations”). The classic paper for this approach is Preisshofen/Zanker 1970/71.

¹³⁹ In Rome, the Greek style therefore “implicitly includes its genesis in the past, but it does not explicitly and intentionally build a bridge to earlier periods,” Hölscher 2006, 245. Zanker (Zanker 1987, 255–261) calls this “Der Symbolwert des Zitats” (“the symbolic value of the citation”).

called – flexibly used, they were also mixed with newly designed figures. The reason for their application, as Hölscher underlines, was content-driven. It is worth asking, therefore, whether styles were used as a direct reference to the past at all. They were – but according to Hölscher only “in specific situations and in a limited, focused sense.”¹⁴⁰ In that vein, evoking Egyptian styles and themes could be reminiscent of Actium, or a specific Hellenistic style could be reminiscent of Alexander the Great, to whom Augustus wanted to be associated. These kinds of references are to be expected at sites that evinced ideological memories; in the central places of public life where political identity was played out. Hölscher defines this explicit way of “looking back” as cultural memory; the more implicit emulation of earlier sets of visual styles he characterises as cultural knowledge.¹⁴¹ In the case of Augustus’ cultural revolution we see both.¹⁴²

Material culture from late Republican and Augustan Rome shows many examples of styles made up by “looking back,” eclecticism and bricolage outside the dynastic realm, as well. An example directly relevant for Antiochan Commagene is the so-called Second Pompeian style that has already been briefly discussed in 1.1 above.¹⁴³ Styles and themes from all across the *oikumene* were used to make exciting new combinations; it was all about the “charms of variation.”¹⁴⁴ (Fig. 4.10) As has been concluded above, questions about the (“national”) origin of motifs are rather unuseful in such a context: these styles and themes are not culture-styles in the limited sense of the classification of a cultural group.¹⁴⁵ Tybout, therefore,

¹⁴⁰ Hölscher 2006, 255.

¹⁴¹ Following Assmann 1992, in which this distinction is extensively discussed.

¹⁴² As an example of the first and beyond the appropriation of elements from the Eastern Mediterranean, the tradition, probably established in the Augustan period, that a *triumphator* was represented as *rex* and clad in an Etruscan costume during that ceremony could be mentioned.

¹⁴³ See Tybout 1989, 29, which talks about the creation of “autonomous, imaginary architectural worlds” (“autonome, imaginäre Architekturwelten”). Note with Grüner 2004, 285 the difficulty of taking this bricolage for what it is when characterising the paintings from the *Villa della Farnesina*: “a confusing amalgamation of Baroque, Mannerist and neo-classical influences” (“ein verwirrendes Amalgam aus barocken, manieristischen und klassizistischen Einflüssen”). Throughout his book Grüner cannot really choose between ambivalence and innovation to characterise his material. Within the study of Roman wall-painting, Eristov (Eristov 1994) uses the term “bricolage” to characterise the Fourth Pompeian style.

¹⁴⁴ Tybout 1989, 353: “The essential trait of the second style was from the very beginning its autonomy vis-à-vis earlier models” (“Wesentlicher Zug des zweiten Stils ist von Anfang an die Autonomie gegenüber seinen Vorbildern”). Cf. now also Grüner 2004, part A in particular.

¹⁴⁵ The reasons for specific forms of bricolage were context-dependent. For his case, Tybout (Tybout 1989) argued that the paintings demonstrated that elites were trying to show off by suggesting immense richness, while at the same time the imaginary world depicted on their walls could provide escapism.



Figure 4.10 Example of a Second Pompeian style wall painting from the Oplontis Villa, c. 60–40 BC, with elements from different origins making up exciting new combinations.

rightly concluded that the vexing question of the origin and character of the Second Pompeian style – a question traditionally phrased as Roman versus Hellenistic – is, in fact, not relevant.¹⁴⁶

This section looks for parallels to the eclecticism of the Antiochan visual language. It has so far demonstrated that it is not difficult to find many examples of this kind of bricolage in late Republican and Augustan Rome – inside and outside the dynastic realm. In the first century BC, Rome became a sophisticated and influential centre of late Hellenistic art, where processes of such appropriation seem to have been common in several media and several social strata.¹⁴⁷ It has been demonstrated that trying to account for the different styles and elements in terms of ethnic or

¹⁴⁶ The same reasoning applies to another category of material culture from roughly the same period, which has been widely discussed in terms of cultural character: Roman veristic portraits. This very lifelike display of people and their physical characteristics was often regarded as typically Roman, and it has even been suggested that this Republican verism embodied Roman identity, or, when employed by Hellenistic rulers in the East, was used as a means of expressing loyalty to Rome. Building on earlier work by other scholars, Croz (*Croz 2002*), however, has argued that as a consequence of the Roman conquering of the East, a new style emerged that was rooted in Italic as well as in Hellenistic traditions (of which Rome itself was already a part), and that this new style was aimed simultaneously at Romans and people in the Eastern Mediterranean under Roman rule. Also in this case the dichotomy of Roman versus Hellenistic is a false one. For this debate see also 1.1 (with further [bibliography](#)).

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Pollitt 1993, 223.

cultural affiliations is a limited approach, which is likely to put us on the wrong track of interpretation. Instead, styles, themes and elements were used as part of a semantic (in Hölscher's words) system in which they sometimes were appropriated to evoke very specific historical associations (cultural memory), but much more often served to evoke and communicate much more general (historical) associations (cultural knowledge). They had acquired these possibilities, their agency, because of their continuous appropriations over time, or, in other words, their cultural biography. It is important to stress the latter point, as it is mainly there that my ideas about the functioning of a *koine* of Hellenistic-Roman styles in material culture differ from those originally formulated by Hölscher.¹⁴⁸

Did such practices function in other parts of the (late) Hellenistic world as well?¹⁴⁹

4.3.2 Parthian Royal Ideology

For the Parthian world, this question is difficult to answer due to a lack of (specific) data, especially outside the dynastic realm. But what we have clearly supports the picture that has been drawn for late Republican and Augustan Rome. Below I will briefly summarise some of the most significant sources – focusing in particular on the appropriation and bricolage of Persian elements that played no role in discussing Republican and Augustan Rome, but that are crucial to the Antiochan bricolage.

As a sign of (what is often understood as) active Parthian interest in Greek culture, few scholars fail to recall the story by Plutarch which tells that, when news reached the Parthian court of the defeat of the Romans at Carrhae in 53 BC, King Orodes and his entourage were watching a performance of Euripides' *Bacchae*.¹⁵⁰ If anything, this is Hellenism:

¹⁴⁸ See Versluys 2013a and 2015a; Van Eck/Versluys/ter Keurs 2015; and 1.2 earlier. See also Squire 2013 for a similar critique. Although Meyer (Meyer 2013) does not use Hölscher 1987, his interpretation towards Greco-Scythian art criticises semiotics by talking about Greco-Scythian art as “semiotic and embodied” (21).

¹⁴⁹ Both Versluys 2013a and 2015a discuss the functioning of this practice more in detail, using the terms universalisation and particularisation to explain why the meaning of the semantic elements is much more about their continuous appropriations than about their historical origin.

¹⁵⁰ Plutarch, *Crassus* 33; cf. Fowler 2005, 154–155 for text, translation and commentary. Note that Plutarch's underlying message seems to be that that their Hellenism, in fact, missed the point; in this way, he could characterise Parthians as barbarians anyway. On this subject in general, see Wolski 1983 and the splendid overview of available sources on the Parthians presented in Hackl/Jacobs/Weber 2010.

not Hellenisation. Symbols of Parthian royalty were a mix of Greek/Hellenistic and Persian elements. The white cloth diadem of Hellenistic kings, for instance, was combined with the long hair, beard, torcs, long-sleeved jackets and trousers of the Persian tradition. The Parthians also added elements and innovations of their own and thus developed “an entirely new and distinctive royal image” out of references to various traditions.¹⁵¹ Fowler has argued that the Achaemenid and the Hellenistic strands were the most important constituents of this new image, and that they served to underline the legitimacy of Parthian royal ideology.¹⁵² Until recently it was generally believed that the Parthians presented themselves as heirs to the Achaemenids as their main strategy of self-presentation – a process that would have become even more intense in the first century AD. Examples of this practice would include the Parthian re-use of the ideologically charged Achaemenid site of Behistun (Fig. 3.4); their royal titulature in which the Parthians adopted the Achaemenid title “King of Kings”; the use of royal portraiture styles with distinctly Persian elements (see above); and the conscious imitation of Achaemenid royal virtues as being distinctly Parthian. Recent research has a somewhat more nuanced approach.¹⁵³ The Greek/Hellenistic element, on the other hand, is mainly visible in coinage: up to approximately AD 50 all Parthian coins bear legends in Greek. However, in reality this may have had more to do with the context of monetisation: it is doubtful whether the Parthians were actively placing themselves in a Greek/Hellenistic tradition in this way. The epithet *philhellen* is often considered another indication of Greek/Hellenistic influence. It is inscribed on coins from the mid second century BC, and became part of the standard Parthian royal style afterwards.¹⁵⁴ In Chapter 3 it has already been concluded that styling yourself as *philhellen* served to claim membership of the (wider) Hellenistic world and the circle of Hellenistic kings. Finally, there is the example of King Orodes, who was “well acquainted with the Greek

¹⁵¹ Cf. Fowler 2005, 143–147, 147 and J. Curtis 2000, 23–34. On Parthian royal ideology, see Wiesehöfer 1996 and, more in general, now Jacobs 2014.

¹⁵² Fowler 2005. The resemblance to the Antiochan case is obvious, as Fowler himself already noted. Bruno Jacobs in Hackl/Jacobs/Weber 2010, I, 77–111 is more critical in this respect.

¹⁵³ See several of the contributions to Strootman/Versluys 2017, in particular Jacobs 2017. Note that already Fowler (Fowler 2005, 150–151) distances himself somewhat from such an ideological interpretation: “it is by no means clear how far Arsacid imagery is ‘consciously’ appropriating or aligning itself with an Achaemenid past . . . The Achaemenid strand in Arsacid royal imagery is present and significant, but not in my view central.”

¹⁵⁴ Fowler (Fowler 2005) sees this as “an opening gambit for friendly dialogue with the Greek communities.”

language and literature” and, as mentioned above, liked to watch Euripides’ plays with friends such as King Artavasdes of Armenia, who “actually composed tragedies, and wrote orations and histories.”¹⁵⁵ If we may believe Plutarch, this indicates that the lesson “acquiring civilisation implies hellenisation” (see 4.2 above) was clearly understood in the Parthian part of Hellenistic Eurasia as well. With these various forms of Hellenism, the Seleucids – who “did Greek” in some contexts and for particular reasons as well (see 3.5) – played an important role for the Parthians as their immediate predecessors.¹⁵⁶

Although brief, this sketch of the elements that made up Parthian royal ideology is of utmost importance as a parallel to Antiochan Commagene and the genesis of the Antiochan style. Antiochos I was similar to Arsaces I in that he came from obscure origins.¹⁵⁷ Like Arsaces I, he put together a royal ideology that used the Achaemenid dynasty for legitimation – without it being central to the concept as a whole – and combined it with Greek/Hellenistic elements. Similar to the Parthians, Antiochos I created something new by the juxtaposition and blending of discrete elements suggestive of different cultural traditions. One of the merits of Fowler’s approach is that he argues against the scholarly dichotomy that presents the Parthians as Eastern (Achaemenid) *or* Western (Greek); he tries to validate the Parthian style in its own right.¹⁵⁸

In addition to the evidence on royal ideology, there are some sources from outside the dynastic context as well. Colledge mentions how “elements from Iranian, Semitic and Greek cultures ... all intermingled, and varying in proportion from place to place and from period to period.”¹⁵⁹ The logic of the appropriation of these elements and the way in which they came together in a specific social context need further investigation.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Quotes from Plutarch, *Crassus* 33. ¹⁵⁶ See *Dabrowa 2010*.

¹⁵⁷ Instructive in this respect is also *Holt 1999* on the Diodotids of Bactria.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. *Fowler 2005*, 129. The same unfruitful dichotomy has been observed in discussions on attempts to describe the Antiochan style. Although sympathetic towards his defence of Parthian culture against modern criticism (that uses characterisations as “a would-be Greekness infected with an ineradicable taint of barbarism”), I doubt, however, whether calling the Romans “the real barbarians” will help to establish a “more nuanced view.” *Jacobs 2014* is an important and convincing attempt to establish this new approach.

¹⁵⁹ *Colledge 1986*, 3. A general introduction on the Parthians and Parthian material culture with attention to these aspects is provided in *Wiesehöfer 1998*; a recent exploration entitled “le rayonnement oriental de la culture parthe” is published in *Topoi* 17/1 (2011). On Parthian religion, which is left out of the discussion here, see *De Jong 2013*.

¹⁶⁰ Along the lines of what the [previous section](#) has summarised for Republican and Augustan Rome or what *Dusinberre 2003* provided for Achaemenid Sardis. The articles in *Jacobs 2014* are a first and important attempt in that direction.

To sum up: in the Parthian world we can, as far as royal ideology is concerned, clearly speak about processes of eclecticism and bricolage. Out of various elements suggestive of other cultural traditions, something distinctly new was created through strategic appropriation. As Matthew Canepa has it: “The Arsakids purposefully selected and integrated aspects of Macedonian kingship and Hellenistic culture into their developing court culture, bending them to their purposes and blending them with Iranian traditions.”¹⁶¹ We can also deduce, as far as our evidence goes, that this was often not a direct consequence of fusion (*Verschmelzung*) but that it was done for specific, political, reasons. Parthian royal ideology has proven to be a direct parallel to Antiochan Commagene, emphasizing, once again, that it might not be the exception to the norm, as it is often represented.

4.3.3 Religious Monumental Building in the Eastern Mediterranean

In both the Roman and the Parthian parts of the late Hellenistic world, new styles were created out of elements that carried strong associations and thus made their presence felt. These individual elements had impact because they referred to cultural traditions that had played an important role in the history of the Mediterranean and Near East for a long time already. For the Roman world there is much detailed information available on these processes of appropriation and bricolage, which Hölscher was able to demonstrate as not just a “grabbing around” but as processes revolving around what he imagines as a truly semantic system. In this system, the elements were most often used *not* because of their specific historical origin, but because of the more general cultural and historical associations that got attached to them throughout time. These associations were deemed appropriate for certain themes and certain contexts. Cultural memory and cultural knowledge are therefore certainly of crucial importance when we want to understand the reasons behind specific forms of bricolage and the impact or agency of culture-styles; like the Augustan use of Greek classicism or the Antiochan use of Hellenism and Persianism. But there is more. For the Parthian world, it is difficult to reconstruct such a “system” due to a lack of data. Parthian royal ideology, however, clearly shows seemingly similar processes of appropriation and bricolage. With the making of a new Parthian style and dynastic ideology, Persianism and

¹⁶¹ Canepa 2017, 213.

Hellenism were both crucial constituents – as they were for Antiochos I. Discussing Rome and Parthia has clearly suggested possible reasons for bricolage in the first century BC, especially for dynastic projects. It has not, however, focused so much on what different forms this bricolage could entail. This will be a focal point of the final part of this section that will also underline, once again, how common these practices were in the late Hellenistic world.

For a better understanding of first-century BC eclecticism and bricolage as a process – in the Eastern Mediterranean in particular – the publication of the monograph by Stefan Freyberger (1998) was most important.¹⁶² This book provided, for the first time, an overview of highly eclectic architecture in Syria and the Levant that made clear how widespread the phenomenon actually was.¹⁶³ Freyberger's approach to his data was also important because he interpreted this eclecticism as an active choice of appropriation – and not simply as a reflection of the geographical position of the region “at the crossroad of cultures.” Furthermore, he investigated the reasons behind all these different forms of eclecticism by calling them innovative. And although he does not use the concept as such, Freyberger identifies the practice of bricolage as the way in which all this is achieved.¹⁶⁴ To broaden the picture – and in order to avoid over-dependency on a single scholarly opinion on the

¹⁶² First-century BC bricolage was certainly part of a development that stretched back further in time. An important “predecessor” to the examples discussed in this section, for instance, is the remarkable complex at ‘Iraq al Amir, dating to the first part of the second century BC, for which see Will/Larché 1991, describing it as the *interpretatio graeca* of an oriental building; Larché/Braemer/Geyer 2005; and recently Kropp 2013, 98–107, which suggests differentiating between “a ground floor of local or Ancient Near Eastern character (massive megalithic exterior, *bit hilani*, bent entrance) and a second floor, which adopts the loftiness and rich architectural decoration of Alexandrian palaces.” I will not deal with these earlier examples, however, as they are not directly relevant as parallels to what happens in Antiochan Commagene.

¹⁶³ Note, however, that Lauter (Lauter 1986, 290–296) already saw “Harmonisation and the bringing together of heterogeneous elements” (“Angleichung und Zusammenschluss des Heterogenen”) as one of the main characteristics of Hellenistic architecture in general and that Colledge (Colledge 1987, 14) had already noted the popularity of eclectic styles in the first century BC more in general: “Instead, what had now blossomed right across western Asia was ‘hybrid’ work in which Greek and various locally derived styles mingled.”

¹⁶⁴ Freyberger calls this principle *Syntax*, which he defines as follows: “Bau- und Dekorformen aus verschiedenen Vorbildern individuell umzubilden und zu einem kompositen Gebilde eigenwillig zusammenzusetzen” (“Recomposing individually various construction elements and decorative forms, and assembling them to a composite structure in an original way”) (Freyberger 1998, 4–5).

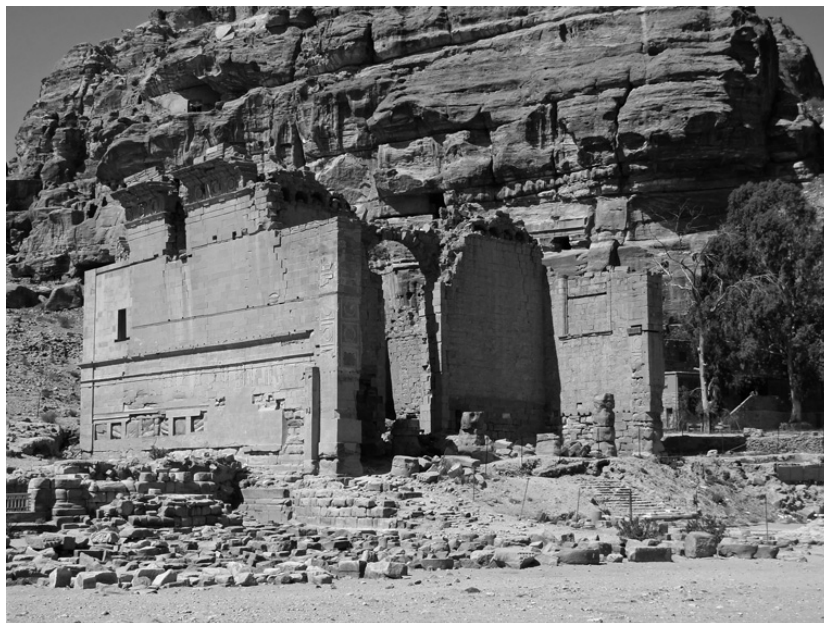


Figure 4.11 Petra, temple complexes at western end of the colonnaded street built around 30 BC: visible are the Qasr al-Bint and the southern temple, in situ.

Syrian and Levantine region alone¹⁶⁵ – this section will also present some similar examples from Asia Minor.¹⁶⁶

Three temple buildings located at the western end of the colonnaded street in Petra effectively illustrate Freyberger's main point concerning *Syntax* or bricolage. (Fig. 4.11) Together these three temples – the Qasr al-Bint, the so-called *Löwen-Greifen-Tempel* and the southern temple – probably formed a single complex.¹⁶⁷ The building of the Qasr al-Bint may have been initiated circa 30 BC. In its architecture and architectural decoration many of the

¹⁶⁵ Before giving ample space to Freyberger it is important, however, to look at responses to his work. Reviews include: Downey 1999, 565–566; Gawlikowski 1998; Schmidt-Colinet 1998/1999, 550; and Lichtenberger 2000. They make clear that the book has certainly met with criticism, which mainly focuses (1) on Freyberger's proposals for a significantly earlier dating of some of the complexes discussed and (2) on his interpretation of some of them as *Karawanestationen*. Although these issues will be dealt with below, they are not central to the core argument of the present study. I will, therefore, not discuss (or use) Freyberger's dating proposals or his interpretation of the complexes, but instead draw on his overview and analysis of first-century BC eclecticism and bricolage in Syria and the Levant. In that respect, in my opinion, the volume has not received the attention it deserves. For an elaboration and a sophisticated theoretical contextualisation of this perspective, see now Andrade 2013.

¹⁶⁶ Berns 2003 presents a most useful and up-to-date overview of *Memorialbauten* from the late Hellenistic period in that region in general.

¹⁶⁷ For this complex most recently Kropp 2013, 281–290 with an overview of scholarly opinions and earlier bibliography.

styles and forms available from the Hellenistic repertoire were presented next to each other. Elements suggestive of Greek cultural traditions dominated – but the way in which they were applied was clearly Oriental.¹⁶⁸ Although constructed somewhat later, the rich so-called *Löwen-Greifen-Tempel* may have been planned at the same time as the Qasr al-Bint. Here the combination of the various elements was even more playful and innovative while, as with the Qasr al-Bint, the application and use of Greek elements followed a local format.¹⁶⁹ Apparently, it was of great importance to the Nabateans to venerate their deities in richly decorated buildings that drew heavily on Hellenistic visual culture, most particularly on elements suggestive of Greek cultural traditions. These new monumental buildings deliberately referred to various cultural traditions – they provided what Freyberger calls “particularised quotations” (“Zitate im Ausschnitt”). He is explicit on how these “quotations” were put together and used:

Since the buildings make references to different layouts and elevations, as well as to details of a wide range of decorative shapes, they do not constitute a specific Nabatean, Palmyrian, Auranitic or Hatran type of temple, but composite buildings. Their common characteristics are based on the fact that they display all available forms side by side, arranged equivalently, and represented in the most elaborate form. The quantitative demonstration is not only characteristic of single buildings, but also expressed in the accumulation of several temples of different shape. This is the peculiarity which characterises the cityscape of all larger caravan stations.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ “Den Auftraggebern kam es darauf an, alle verfügbaren Formen gleichwertig nebeneinander zu präsentieren” (“The contractors took specific care to represent all available forms equivalently side by side”) (Freyberger 1998, 9) and “Die Motive sind an griechischen Vorbildern orientiert, ihr flächendeckendes Arrangement ist aber ein östliches Gestaltungsprinzip” (“The motives are based on Greek models, while their comprehensive arrangement follows Eastern design principles”) (Freyberger 1998, 10). Splendid reconstruction drawings that also take into account the stucco decorations of the building can be found in Larché/Zayadine 2003. For a colossal statue from this context, see 3.1.

¹⁶⁹ Freyberger 1998, 20: “Die neue Formensprache des ‘Löwen-Greifen-Tempels’ kommt in der freien Kombination der verschiedenen Vorbilder und in der quantitativen Wiedergabe des Dekors zum Vorschein” (“The new design language of the ‘Lion-Griffon’ Temples emerged from the free combination of the different models and the quantitative reproduction of decor”) and “Die Gestaltung des Weihreliefs wurde vielmehr von der Absicht bestimmt, das eigene traditionelle Göttermal mit fremden Formen aufzuwerten” (“The design of the votive reliefs was largely determined by the intention to add value to the own traditional divine feasting by incorporating foreign forms”) (20).

¹⁷⁰ Freyberger 1998, 25: “Da die Bauten unterschiedliche Grund- und Aufrisse sowie ein großes Spektrum von Dekorformen in Ausschnitten zitieren, konstituieren sie keinen spezifischen ‘nabataischen,’ ‘palmyrenischen,’ ‘auranitischen,’ oder ‘hatrenischen’ Tempeltypus, sondern komposite Bauten. Ihre spezifische gemeinsamen Merkmale liegen darin begründet, daß sie alle verfügbaren Formen in extrem aufwendiger Wiedergabe gleichwertig nebeneinander zeigen. Die quantitative Zurschaustellung kommt aber nicht nur an den Formen eines

Apparently, it mattered to the Nabateans to make buildings as composite, different and innovative as possible – and to combine these aspects. These buildings all look very different, but in fact that is their common characteristic.

A second group of monuments Freyberger discusses is located in Transjordan.¹⁷¹ These temples were located in strategic locations along the road system – apparently, visibility was deemed important. Freyberger assumes that their building was instigated by local elites who wanted to imitate what had been done at Petra.¹⁷²

In the Hauran, several monumental buildings located at strategic cross-roads have been preserved, such as the monuments at Sī (Seeia).¹⁷³ The site, first explored by the Princeton Missions to Syria at the end of the nineteenth century and then by a French mission from the 1970s onwards, was a communal sanctuary at the border of the steppe with three main sanctuaries on the hilltop dating from the late first century BC to around AD 100. One of those is the temple for Baalshamin, the construction of which was begun circa 30 BC. The monumental complex, with a *temenos* of 50 × 24 metres, shows (what are called) Oriental, Greek, Roman and local traits, and through the sophisticated combination of these Sī has rightly been characterised as “an architectural milestone of far-reaching

einzigem Bauwerks, sondern in der Anhäufung mehrerer Tempelbauten unterschiedlichster Gestalt demonstrativ zur Geltung. Diese Eigenheit ist dem ‘Stadtbild’ aller größeren Karawanenstationen gemeinsam.”

¹⁷¹ Freyberger 1998, 26–44; below I will briefly summarise the data. The Zeus-Olympios sanctuary in Gerasa may have been planned as early as the latter first century BC. It was a building for an indigenous god equated with Zeus-Olympios. The sanctuary was paid for by the local population but at the same time connected with the imperial cult. The building shows stylistic characteristics from different areas, and traditions from both the past and the present. The temple at Qasr al-Darih has been dated to the early imperial period by Freyberger. It has a remarkable, individual style through the use of different versions of a standardised groundplan. The temple at Hirbat al-Tannūr was dedicated to Qōs, a local god that could be equated with Zeus, and is better known. Ceramic finds suggest that building activity began at the end of the second century BC. The temple is very similar to the temple at Qasr al-Darih and includes rooms that were probably *triclinia* for ritual banquets. Its chronology suggests that older phases were faithfully integrated into newer buildings. Some of the statuary of the sanctuary has been preserved. These finds suggest that local gods were represented in both traditional and Hellenised forms, as they were in Petra. I leave out here the temple for Allāt at Gabal Ram.

¹⁷² Freyberger 1998, 44.

¹⁷³ Recent publications include Dentzer-Feydy/Dentzer/Blanc *et al.* 2003 and Kropp 2013, 290–302; both have an overview of the earlier bibliography. Kropp characterises the architecture as a “playful approach” showing that “an unusual degree of value was placed on individual virtuosity and originality” (302).



Figure 4.12 The Baalshamin temple at Seeia, showing the creation of a new and original architectural language in the Hauran at the end of the first century BC. In situ, 2014.

significance.”¹⁷⁴ (Fig. 4.12) This becomes also clear from the remains of the so-called temple 2, dedicated to a local deity, perhaps the Tyche of Seeia, and temple 3, that had a cella with four pillars *in antis* suggestive of a late-Republican podium temple.¹⁷⁵ The buildings were not decorated on the outside; something that might be interpreted as a distinctly local characteristic.¹⁷⁶ Freyberger argues that the repertoire of styles, elements

¹⁷⁴ Kropp 2013, 297. See already the characterisation by Freyberger 1998, 49: “bestand aus einem komposit zusammengesetzten Baukörper östlicher Prägung, der eine an zeitgleichen stadtrömischen Tempelbauten orientierte Fassadengliederung erhielt. (-) Die bildlichen und wörtlichen Angleichungen an die griechische Kultur und die Übernahme griechischer Bräuche wie die Aufstellung von Ehrenstatuen für Privatpersonen in Heiligtümern dienten den lokalen Würdenträgern von Seeia dazu, sich als griechisch kultivierte Weltbürger der Koine darzustellen” (“consisted of a composite construction under Eastern influences, which received a facade based on contemporaneous urban Roman temples . . . The figurative and literal adjustments based on Greek culture, and the acquisition of Greek customs such as the erection of honorary statues for individuals in sanctuaries, served the local dignitaries of Seeia to represent themselves as sophisticated global citizens of the *koine*”) (49).

¹⁷⁵ For podium temples as not being an indication of “Romanness” in the Levant and Near East, see the sophisticated discussion of the Ras el-Soda temple in Naerebout 2007 with a catalogue of relevant comparisons.

¹⁷⁶ Freyberger noted that local stone was used, not only because it was easily available, but also “in der Absicht, die Bauten in eigenwilligen und unverwechselbaren Formen lokaler Prägung zu präsentieren” (“with the intention to present the buildings in the unconventional and distinctive forms of local traits”).

and motives appropriated could hardly be characterised as local, however. At stake at the Baalshamin temple would be the creation of a distinctly own, new and original visual language.¹⁷⁷ The temple at Mušannaf has been dated somewhat later by Freyberger, namely to the first half of the first century AD.¹⁷⁸ It is an important monument for the development of Freyberger's *Syntax*. The examples from Petra, Transjordan and the Hauran discussed so far clearly illustrate processes of eclecticism and bricolage. In those cases, the architects and builders apparently had a large and abundant variety of styles, motives and elements at their disposal – and they used these in combinations as extensive and innovative as possible. Mušannaf, however, would constitute a turning point, as it provides evidence for a careful selection and reduction from this large repertoire that would soon become normative.¹⁷⁹

A fourth and final group of monuments is located in and around Lebanon.¹⁸⁰ The first and foremost example is the sanctuary of Iupiter Heliopolitanus in Baalbek. The foundation of ancient *Heliopolis* in 15 BC was meant to support Rome's presence in the area. Building is believed to have started circa AD 1, but it clearly did not result – as sometimes described in earlier analyses – in something like Roman imperial art ("römische Reichskunst"). The architecture apparently had to be as exciting and original as possible – the architects were still drawing on a large

¹⁷⁷ Freyberger 1998, 52: "Die Syntax verrät das Bestreben, verschiedene Vorbilder in einer eigenen und neuen Formensprache zur Schau zu stellen . . . Der aus Basalt gearbeitete Dekor der Bauten in Seeia setzt sich aus Formen umgebildeter Vorbilder alexandrinischer, mesopotamischer und stadtrömischer Provenienz zusammen" ("The syntax reveals the desire to display different models on their own and in a new language of forms . . . The décor of the buildings in Seeia, made of basalt, is composed of adapted shapes inspired by examples of Roman, Alexandrian and Mesopotamian origin"). The temple at Slim (Selaima), near Si, was dated by Freyberger to the final quarter of the first century BC, and may have been made by the same workshop. Here the architectural decoration, mainly the composite pilaster capitals, clearly shows "die Aufnahme, Umbildung und Kombination einzelner Formen aus Vorbildern verschiedenster Provenienz" ("the integration, transformation and combination of individual forms of examples of different provenance").

¹⁷⁸ It was made up of a podium temple with 2 columns *in antis*. An inscription records that it was restored in AD 171.

¹⁷⁹ Freyberger 1998, 62: "Sie sind nicht mehr aus einer Formenvielfalt individuell umgebildeter Vorbilder zusammengestellt, sondern auf eine beschränkte Auswahl normierter Formen reduziert, die als vorbildlich galten. Das Bauwerk in Mušannaf ist das früheste bekannte Beispiel im Hauran für die Konzeption der Vereinheitlichung von Formen, die wohl im frühen 1 Jh. n. Chr. ihren Anfang nam" ("They are no longer composed of a diversity of individually transformed models, but reduced to a limited selection of standardised forms, which were considered to be exemplary. The Mušannaf structure is the earliest known example from the Hauran which demonstrates the conception of the unification of forms which had its beginning probably in the early first century AD").

¹⁸⁰ Freyberger 1998, 62–88.



Figure 4.13 Palmyra, temple of Bel: “a completely new language of form of an unprecedented richness.” In situ, 2009.

repertoire of styles and motives. The sanctuary for Zeus Masbachos and Selamanes in Gabal Saih Barakat in northern Syria had a façade that resembled Italic temples, while on the inside it seems to have followed Mesopotamian principles.¹⁸¹ In eastern Syria, lastly, Palmyra provides Freyberger with several examples of his *Syntax*. On the temple for Bel – dedicated in AD 32 but started, as Freyberger argues, in the last third of the first century BC – he concludes that it combined forms that were as diverse as possible in order to propagate “a completely new language of form of an unprecedented richness” (“eine gänzlich neue Formensprache in einem bisher nicht vorhandenen Reichtum”).¹⁸² (Fig. 4.13) In a comparable vein, Butcher characterised the temple of Bel as “symbolic syncretism.”¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ The complex has a *terminus ante quem* from AD 62; Freyberger dates the beginning of the building of the sanctuary to the early imperial period.

¹⁸² Freyberger 1998, 81. Note that the description in Schmidt-Colinet 2005, 12 – “Der Bau zeigt besonders deutlich die Verschmelzung von westlichen (Säulen mit Giebeln) und östlichen (Flachdach und Zinnenkranz) Architekturelementen” (“The construction clearly demonstrates the fusion of Western (columns with gables) and Eastern (flat roof and battlements (crenellation)) architectural elements”) – has a different emphasis: passive *Verschmelzung* (“fusion”) instead of active *Zusammensetzung* (“bricolage”).

¹⁸³ Butcher 2003, 281. Note, however, the problems with the notion of syncretism as discussed in 4.1.

On the basis of this brief characterisation of a large and varied group of monuments from all across Syria and the Levant, a general picture clearly emerges.¹⁸⁴ All examples discussed are dated to the late first century BC and the early first century AD, if we follow Freyberger's proposal, and show a similar form of *Zusammensetzung* or bricolage. This method – or principle – can be defined as follows. Models provenancing from places and traditions as different as possible are made into a composite ensemble that constitutes a new visual language and serves to impress by the display of a quality and richness so far unknown and unparalleled.¹⁸⁵ It can thus be concluded that – in the period from around the middle of the first century BC onwards – it was rather common for religious monumental buildings in the Hellenistic East to amalgamate different forms and styles of material culture that were available in the cultural repertoire. This was done, Freyberger argues, for specific socio-political reasons, which were primarily a consequence of increased wealth. Patrons would try to outdo each other by choosing novel combinations each time, and by adding their own interpretations. They would do so to enhance their self-definition, for legitimation and in order to display their prominent position.¹⁸⁶ All this was only possible, so it seems, through the power vacuum in the pre-provincial Near East that provided local rulers with unprecedented ideological and financial opportunities (see 3.4). Innovative eclecticism – as we

¹⁸⁴ Freyberger also included Hatra in his book. In order to do so, however, he had to thoroughly undermine the traditional second-century AD chronology for the city, and bring it to the early empire. If he is correct in doing so, Hatra would fit well into the general picture “indem es umgebildete Vorbilder griechischer, stadtrömischer und mesopotamischer Provenienz in einem kompositen Gebilde vereint zeigt” (“by displaying transformed examples of Greek, city-Roman and Mesopotamian origin which had been unified into a composite construction”). The “Bauformen” (“building forms”) would have been inspired by Mesopotamian religious architecture, while the “Baudekor” (“architectural design”) would have been more “stadtrömisch” (“city-Roman”). However, I have not included this example, as Hatra falls out of the range of the more Levantine and Syrian examples discussed so far and because I am unable to ascertain whether Freyberger's unconventional dating is correct. For Hatra (and its chronology) see most recently *Dirven* 2013.

¹⁸⁵ In Freyberger's phrasing: It concerns *Vorbilder verschiedenster Provenienz* (“examples of different provenance”) that are made into a *komposites Ensemble* (“composite ensemble”) leading to a *neue Formensprache* (“new language of forms”) with the intention *eine bisher noch nie dagewesene Qualität zur Schau zu stellen* (“an ostentation of unprecedented quality”); see Freyberger 1998, 59 for these terms.

¹⁸⁶ To give some of Freyberger's phrasing again: Local leaders would have experienced a “tiefgreifende Wandel ihres Selbstverständnisses” (“profound transformation of their self-image”). “Um dieses nach außen sichtbar geltend zu machen, waren sie gezwungen, sich in einer gänzlich neuen Weise zu definieren” (“In order to make this claim visible to the outside, they were forced to define themselves in a completely new way”) (103). It was, in other words, “das neue Selbstverständnis der lokalen Stammesfürsten” (“the new self-definition of the local nobility”).

could call it – seems to have been one of the key concepts behind their search for legitimization and display through material culture. All buildings and monuments discussed above were therefore highly individual – they were designed to be different from each other in terms of bricolage. However, this innovative eclecticism is in fact their common characteristic. Freyberger correctly emphasises, therefore, that they cannot be seen as isolated phenomena: similar principles and methods underlay their conception.¹⁸⁷

There are striking resemblances, in a structural way, between the examples here analysed and the Antiochan style. The Antiochan *Bildprogramm*, however, does certainly not fit Freyberger's *Syntax* in all respects. The purpose of the Antiochan style was clearly not to quote a variety of decorative forms as large and diverse as possible; but rather to quote specific ones. Its purpose was not to come to an accumulation of shapes as different as possible; but to come to a specific form of bricolage for particular reasons. Notwithstanding these differences, the eclecticism and bricolage of Antiochos I can only be understood against the background of what evidently was a general trend in the Hellenistic world during the later first century BC. This point is underlined by the fact that its specific manifestation as such is unique. It is interesting to note that the Antiochan programme would be a very early example of this trend, almost predating it.¹⁸⁸

4.4 Cultural Scenarios

A discussion of some very similar examples of “particularised quotations” from Asia Minor might add to the observations on the Roman world, the Parthian world, Syria and the Levant made above. It also usefully broadens our picture even further, and serves as a good overture to the conclusion of this chapter.

From the fourth century BC onwards, the appropriation of elements and styles from various cultural traditions – mainly those suggestive of Athens and its cultural splendour – was not uncommon in the self-display of local

¹⁸⁷ Freyberger 1998, 59. It is therefore indeed not useful to ask about “landschaftgebundene Bautraditionen” (“architectural tradition linked to the landscape”) because this ignores the “composite Gestaltungskonzept” (“composite design concept”) (82). Above, the same conclusion has been drawn in regard to the Second Pompeian style.

¹⁸⁸ Contra Smith (Smith 1988a, 103), therefore, who remarks on Antiochan Commagene, with many other scholars: “However, there is nothing much like these monuments either earlier or later.”

rulers in western Asia Minor. The Mausolleion of Halikarnassos is an example of this trend, as are the well-known heroa in Xanthos and Trysa.¹⁸⁹ The appropriation of foreign elements probably functioned in those contexts to demonstrate that the person in question mattered and knew his way in the wider (Mediterranean and Near Eastern) world. It was a matter of cultural competence. However, this conflation of elements – local elements that were juxtaposed and intermingled to a greater or lesser extent with elements from supra local cultural traditions – is different from the bricolage, the innovative eclecticism that has been defined as characteristic of large parts of the late Hellenistic Mediterranean in the first century BC in the [previous section](#). In this period, so it seems, the availability of elements and styles from various cultural traditions to choose from was much larger – seeing that the results were much newer and more innovative. While we should certainly be aware of these earlier developments to understand what happens in Commagene in the first century BC (see [3.5](#)), we must also look whether there are examples in Asia Minor from the first century BC that, one could almost say, “play” with specific cultural elements and styles for specific reasons in order to be original.¹⁹⁰

The Memmius monument in Ephesos can be considered such an example. ([Fig. 4.14](#)) It was built on a prominent location within the city for C. Memmius, a grandson of Sulla, in the third quarter of the first century BC and is therefore contemporary to Nemrud Dağ. The monument has only been partly preserved.¹⁹¹ The structure was probably around 19 m high and stood on a square plan that was 9 × 9 metres wide. ([Fig. 4.15](#)) The monument was characterised by heterogeneous architectural elements that were piled on top of each other.¹⁹² Memmius himself is displayed in the monument amid his mythical ancestors. The look for innovative originality is clearly witnessed by the three benches that were part of niches placed in the lower part of the structure. These could not be reached, as they were placed

¹⁸⁹ All these examples have been discussed in [3.5](#).

¹⁹⁰ For this metaphor, see [Tybout 1989](#) and [Wallace-Hadrill 1998](#), 90: “Architecture too plays this game. But it does so in a complex way. What we find constantly is not pure Greek or pure Roman, but a mixture, Greek and Roman sitting alongside each other and reflecting off each other.”

¹⁹¹ It was excavated in 1959/1960 and published in [Bammer/Alzinger 1971](#). See, most recently, [Torelli 1988](#); [Otschar 1990](#) (with a new reconstruction proposal); and [Berns 2003](#) sv. Kat. 11A3 (with further previous literature).

¹⁹² [Berns 2003](#), 24: “deren Eindruck von heterogenen, übereinander getürmten Architekturelementen bestimmt wurde” (“an impression determined by heterogeneous architectural elements piled up on top of each other”).



Figure 4.14 Ephesos, monument for C. Memmius, built in the third quarter of the first century BC. In situ, 2010.

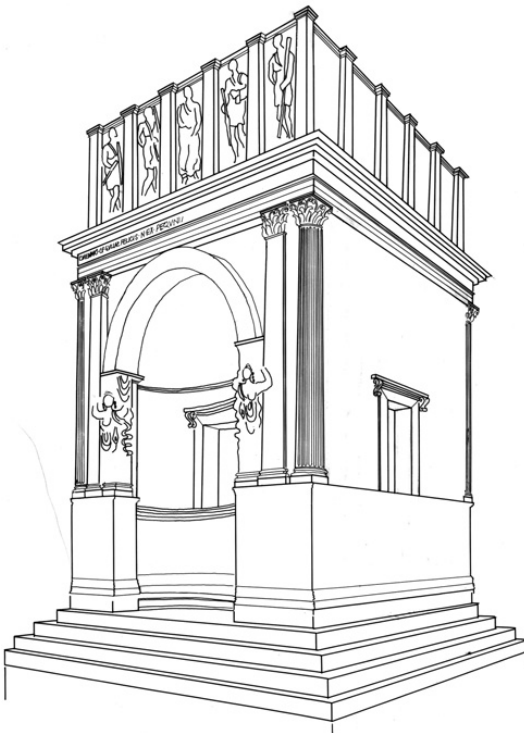


Figure 4.15 Ephesos, Memmius monument, artistic impression of the 19 m high structure.



Figure 4.16 Ephesos, the Octagon as it was uncovered in 1906.

above a socle that stood 1.6 metres high and did not have any steps. The benches, therefore, had no practical use at all – but their placement was highly daring and original.¹⁹³ Another example is the so-called Octagon, which stood only a few hundred metres away from the Memmius monument, on an equally distinct place in the urban landscape.¹⁹⁴ (Figs. 4.16 and 4.17) The monument consists of a rectangular base clad in marble that was built over a vaulted burial chamber. On the rectangular base, an octagonal superstructure was placed with pillars around it. This octagon was framed by pillars and crowned by a pyramid roof. The space underneath the pyramid roof has been described as a cella – although there clearly was no room reserved for cult practice. It is probable that the Ptolemaic princess Arsinoe IV, the

¹⁹³ Berns (*Berns* 2003, 46) seems to hold a negative view of the end result, as he describes it as “ein fast monströser Eklektizismus” (“an almost monstrous eclecticism”). The function of this architectural decor therefore must have been “Zurschaustellung formalen Prunkes” (“ostentation of formal splendour”), with the intention to create “ein origineller Gesamteindruck” (“an overall impression of originality”) through “die Vereinigung einer Vielfalt von Architekturelementen” (“blending of a variety of architectural elements”) into “beispiellose Prunk” (“an unprecedented show-off”) (*Berns* 2003, quotes from 31, 32 and 34). Here we almost have Freyberger’s *Syntax* introduced above, although Berns does not seem to have used Freyberger’s book for his research.

¹⁹⁴ *Berns* 2003 sv. Kat. 11A5 (with further previous literature).

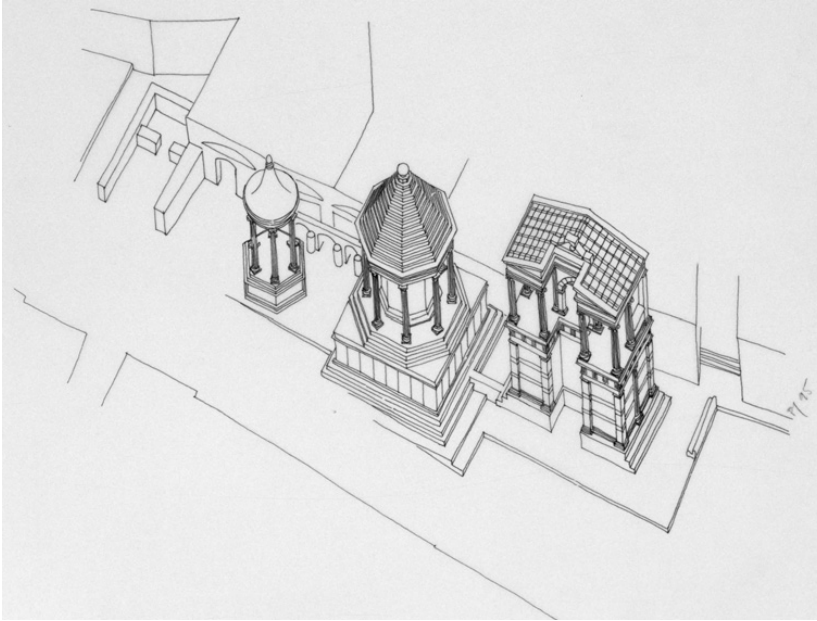


Figure 4.17 Ephesos, artistic impression of the Octagon and adjacent structures.

youngest sister of Cleopatra VII, was buried here after she had been murdered at Ephesos in 41 BC. There are many innovative features visible in the concept and execution of the monument; not in the least the combination of rectangular, octagonal and pyramid in a single structure. It seems that the Octagon displays innovative eclecticism in order to demonstrate the extraordinary possibilities and status of the commissioner as well as the person buried there.¹⁹⁵

This chapter has worked towards explaining how the Antiochan style actively manifested itself in social action and behaviour – what it *did* in Antiochan Commagene – and how the elements used could arrange these effects. It has shown that in order to execute such an analysis one should refrain from making (implicit) value judgements on the Antiochan style. Moreover, (1) one should not regard container categorisations such as Greco-Persian as *explanans*, (2) one should not try to understand the Antiochan style in terms of the relative degree to which it would belong to these containers and hence relate this to the ethnic or cultural make-up of society, and (3) one should refrain from understanding the Antiochan style as a kind of fusion or “*Verschmelzung*” but instead regard it as a conscious juxtaposition.

¹⁹⁵ Berns 2003, 52: “die außerordentlichen Möglichkeiten ihrer Auftraggeber” (“the extraordinary possibilities of the commissioner”).

Chapter 3 concluded that the Antiochan project must be interpreted as an attempt at canon building in order to provide dynastic ideology and social order and has suggested that this was done through a process of bricolage. Chapter 4 has shown what this strategy entailed – namely, that it concerned a juxtaposition and blending of discrete elements suggestive of different cultural traditions within a single new style as the result of a conscious appropriation – and it has illustrated how common and widespread this strategy was in the late Hellenistic world. Some of the many parallels of bricolage briefly discussed in this chapter – like the Second Pompeian style, the religious buildings in Syria and the Levant, and the monuments in Ephesos – have even suggested the existence of (what has been defined as) “innovative eclecticism”: the practice of quoting a variety of decorative forms, as large and diverse as possible, in order to produce something new that caused amazement through its modernity and originality. These parallels – from the Roman West to the Parthian East and from Anatolia to the southern Levant – were also intended to form concentric circles around Antiochan Commagene; each time, as it were, drawing closer to Nemrud Dağ.

One of the main conclusions of this chapter, therefore, is that what Antiochos I did was not only common in the mid first-century BC Hellenistic Mediterranean, as Chapter 3 has shown, but that also the way in which he did it was common. The “unique” – as it is often called – Antiochan visual language is therefore not unique at all, but part of a much wider late Hellenistic trend. What Antiochos I presents us with is a system of representation with the Antiochan style itself being about the complexities of replication. Discussing all the various forms of bricolage in the late Hellenistic world has clearly shown that interpretations of the stylistic elements used in (innovative) eclecticism as being directly related to ethnic or cultural identities are methodologically unsound. Styles and elements suggestive of different cultural traditions are, in fact, cultural scenarios that are part of a shared system of visual references, or *koine*.¹⁹⁶ For the Roman world and through the work of Tonio Hölscher amongst others, we can study the functioning of this system in some detail. For other parts of the Hellenistic world we have less data, and less research has been done from such a perspective – but here the system seems to have functioned quite similarly.¹⁹⁷ How to understand the meaning and the impact, or agency, of

¹⁹⁶ See already *Lauter 1986*, which talks, in regard to Hellenistic architecture in general, about motives as “Zeichen” (“symbols”) that would have semantic connotations (302).

¹⁹⁷ See extensively *Versluys 2013a* and *2015a*.

the elements used in this way? Not only by looking, as has been illustrated, at origins, but also, and probably even mainly, by looking at the associations that these elements built up over time through their continuous appropriations in various contexts.

How, then, can we explain the particular way of bricolage that we see used in Antiochan Commagene? Why were elements suggestive of Greek and Persian cultural traditions juxtaposed and blended at Nemrud Dağ? In order to answer these questions, this chapter has looked at the development of the meanings and associations that these elements built up over time – or, in other words, at their cultural biography. It was concluded that “going Greek” in the first-century BC Mediterranean and Near East was mostly a form of *Hellenism*: a source of social power that should be understood as a choice to associate with civilisation and modernity.¹⁹⁸ In the same time period there clearly functioned something like *Persianism*: a source of social power used to claim dynastic legitimacy in the shadow of Cyrus.¹⁹⁹ The fact that Persian architecture and architectural decoration had always and with great success been focused on displaying kingship and royal power – and thus had become to embody it – will have mattered greatly for this particular choice.²⁰⁰ The agency of the different styles and cultural elements should therefore play an important role with our interpretation. Something suggestive of the Achaemenid tradition will immediately have signalled kingship to the viewer – in discussing the concept of Persianism it was mentioned how in the second half of the fifth century AD, Gobazes, king of Lazica, still relied on the agency of his Persian attire when visiting the Byzantine emperor Leo I. In a similar vein, it was the various elements we call Greek that immediately will have made clear that Antiochos I aimed to have a career at the forefront of the Hellenistic kings. The fact that the combination of these two cultural scenarios and their impact was novel and without precedent was not only a sign of the times, but it also underlined their respective messages. Taking innovative eclecticism seriously, we might even speculate that the juxtapositioning and blending of the two cultural scenarios resulted in an agency that was (much) stronger than the sum of

¹⁹⁸ To retake the phrasing from P. Veyne quoted above. Cf. a similar formulation in Gruen 2003, 272 with regard to the Hellenism of Herod the Great: “setting himself in the mould of Hellenistic monarchs . . . and declaring himself an international figure at home in the Hellenistic world.”

¹⁹⁹ I paraphrase Fowden 1993, 7.

²⁰⁰ For Persian style and/as dynastic display, see Root 1979 and Boardman 2000.

its parts.²⁰¹ It is in this form of agency, I would argue, that the power of the Antiochan style is located – and continues to overwhelm us.²⁰²

²⁰¹ A similar approach towards other examples of Hellenistic bricolage seems implicit in the phrasing of Wallace-Hadrill (*Wallace-Hadrill* 1998, 91) when he concludes on the domestic material culture of the Italian peninsula in the first century BC: “It is in this sense that domestic architecture seems to me, just as sculpture or painting, not to create a Greco-Roman amalgam, but to preserve two alternative languages in conscious juxtaposition with one another.” More explicit is Riggs (*Riggs* 2005, 5) in formulating her approach towards a proper analysis of the visual languages used in tombs from Roman Egypt: “by discussing precisely how the divergent pictorial and symbolic traditions interact.” For how this process of enhancing agency through specific forms of bricolage could work in another historical and dynastic context, see *Walker* 2012.

²⁰² For the “haunting” character of certain styles in antiquity (and beyond) more in general, see *Versluys* 2015b. Fundamental for this approach is the splendid study *Meyer* 2013.

5 | Postscript: Between East and West?

As so often in Mediterranean history, the problem is not in finding continuities, but in assessing which ones are significant – and why.
(Horden/Purcell 2000, 411)

Every general textbook on Anatolian archaeology starts with characterising the area as a bridge between East and West.¹ Also more specialised studies – in their introduction or conclusion – often duly mention its intermediary position or *Mittlerstellung* between Orient and Occident.² This is also how Commagene is often perceived: as a crossroad of cultures – “trans-Anatolia” – a place where cultures met.³ A recent conference highlighted some important problems with this view of Anatolia as a cultural corridor: “it implies passivity, over-simplifies the complexities of ancient communities and inter-regional exchange, and is based upon the assumption of divides that are culturally constructed.”⁴ We have seen that all of these problems are indeed very relevant for the study of Commagene. Chapter 3 argued that in most literature the implicit equation between an East/West geographical context and an East/West dynastic image over-simplifies the subject, and denies agency on the part of Antiochos I. Chapter 4 illustrated that most scholarly literature divides the Antiochan style into separated cultural containers – and thereby creates a divide that largely is our own cultural construction. An edited volume

¹ The metaphor is also pervasive in discussions about modern Turkey and its position in the world as well as about regions within Turkey; see Mitchell *forthcoming*, in which ancient Commagene and the example it constitutes for present-day Adiyaman plays an important role. I thank Professor Mitchell for sending me his (unpublished) manuscript.

² As do studies on what is called the archaeology of the Near East in general; see, to give but one example, Balty 1996.

³ Cf. the “Transanatolia conference” that was organised in 2006 and published in *Anatolian Studies* 57 in 2007. Several articles, especially Greaves 2007, aim at a similar deconstruction of the *Mittlerstellung* as this section does. Unfortunately for our purpose the volume only deals with Anatolia from the Neolithic to the Late Bronze Age. Wider in that respect is an earlier, comparable volume: Blum *et al.* 2002. Cf. also Röllig 1992.

⁴ Greaves 2007, from the abstract on page 1. See Schwertheim 2005, 7 and Mac Sweeney 2009, 122 for similar critiques, and note the first sentence in Burney/Marshall Lang 1971: “Anatolia has been described as the bridge uniting the Near East and Europe; but it has always been much more than that.”

from 2007 with the title *Incontri tra culture nell'Oriente ellenistico e romano* illustrates this pervasive way of thinking about Commagene specifically – and about culture contact in the Hellenistic and Roman world more generally.⁵ The book shows the Herakles *dexiosis* from Antiochan Commagene on its cover. The relief apparently is meant as a literal illustration of the subject of the book (*incontri tra culture*/the meeting of cultures) with Herakles representing the Greek cultural container and the king in Persian attire representing the Oriental container. As an article published in 2015 has it: Nemrud Dağ as the *dexiosis* of East and West.⁶ I hope that the present study has convincingly argued for a different approach.

It is much too simplistic to say that, because of the geographical location where it was created, the Antiochan style is an “*Orient-Okzident Gedanke*” (“conception of Orient meets Occident”).⁷ In a similar vein it is much too simplistic to say that the Antiochan style is the logical and direct outcome of the chronological period in which it was created. It was not, as has often been maintained, the “sheer fluidity” of the period that could only result in a climate of uncontrolled eclecticism.⁸ Such interpretations argue that styles of material culture were intermingled simply because everything was intermingling in a chaotic period.⁹ This, however, was clearly not the case for Antiochos I: like many of his contemporaries, he made a conscious choice from a range of alternatives that were available to him.¹⁰ Of course, those options were determined by his geographical and chronological context to a certain degree – and certainly by his position in society. A Hellenistic king ruling a small kingdom in North Africa, for instance, would have had different cultural scenarios at his disposal; but only partly so. Moreover, we have seen the Augustan period to be an important watershed in that it limited the range of and experiments with cultural scenarios. What makes the late Hellenistic and “pre-provincial” forms of eclecticism and bricolage particularly interesting is the fact that they

⁵ Gnoli/Muccioli 2007. ⁶ Çevik 2015.

⁷ As, amongst many other studies, Schwertheim 2005, 80 does.

⁸ Fowler (Fowler 2005, 147) uses this term to account for the emergence of the new style of Parthian royal imagery, discussed in 4.3 as a parallel to the Antiochan style.

⁹ In a similar vein Zanker (Zanker 1987, 83) saw the mausoleum of Augustus as having no convincing form and being eclectic due to the social unrest and hectic situation; cf. 3.1.

¹⁰ To give another example of this process of appropriation or bricolage by Antiochos I – not related to style: the great cult inscription prescribes the rituals and performances to be carried out on the Antiochan sites in great detail but never mentions the other standard ingredients of Hellenistic court culture, namely musical performances and athletic contexts. Also in this respect Antiochos I selectively took from the Hellenistic repertoire. Cf. Kropp 2013, 258.

purposefully looked for unique and novel combinations. In this process the agency of cultural styles and elements from the Hellenistic *koine* was enhanced and accumulated. This book has only briefly dealt with first-century BC innovative eclecticism as a general phenomenon.¹¹ It has indicated some of its background, and has discussed the cultural biography of some of its elements. This limited discussion has, however, strongly suggested that the concept is crucial in order to reach a better understanding of the functioning, impact and agency of Hellenistic *koine* – and of the genesis of Roman imperial art as a particular, Augustan canonisation out of that Hellenistic *koine*.¹²

One of the main conclusions of this study is also about the limitations of the current evidence. For our period, Commagenean archaeology largely consists of Antiochan material culture that has to be interpreted as a dynastically created court-style. We are ignorant of its relation to contemporary Commagenean society and the ethnic make-up or cultural identity of its inhabitants. The elements used are best understood as cultural scenarios; the cultural biography and “semantics” of which have to be studied in order to understand their application and impact. This has two important consequences for Commagenean archaeology. First, that all information deriving from the Antiochan programme cannot automatically and without serious deconstruction be used as a historical source on Commagene in the first century BC and before. Second, that the archaeological research in and on the region should try to engage itself more with the attempt to grasp social context outside the dynastic realm – in order to establish its relation with the Antiochan programme, among other things.

From this study, late Hellenistic Commagene has emerged as one of the places in the Hellenistic world where new and original visual languages were created. The Antiochan style apparently was not taken up throughout the Mediterranean and Near East at large; although the Philopappos monument in Athens might have taken direct inspiration from it. In terms of historical explanation, it is nevertheless not very useful to describe it as a “failed attempt.” Through its innovative and unprecedented combination of Hellenism and Persianism, it is very well possible that in terms of impact and agency the Antiochan style was most successful in what it wanted to achieve at the time. The fact that it did not develop into

¹¹ To explore this further the notion of “intentional hybrids” as originally formulated by Mikhail Bakhtin should probably play an important role; cf. *Papalexandrou 2010*. Archaeologists sometimes use the concept of “hybridisation” in this context; see *Van Dommelen/Knapp 2010*.

¹² Cf. *Zanker 1976*; *Spawforth 2011*; *Versluys 2013a* and *2015a*.

a canon probably had much more to do with the Augustan political and cultural revolution, and its consequences for Commagene and Near Eastern royalty, than with the assumption that it would have had a faulty design. This view on the Antiochan dynastic project might be supported by the observation that other innovative Commagenean “inventions” were successfully perceived and taken up in the Hellenistic and Roman world at large.¹³ It has been argued that the programme of Agrippa’s Pantheon in Rome was inspired and influenced by the Antiochan project.¹⁴ The cult of Mithras might be an example of a successful Commagenean innovation – if Roger Beck is right in arguing that Mithraism, with its distinctive mix of Persian and Greco-Roman aspects, came into being in first-century BC Commagene.¹⁵ Another case in point is the cult of Iupiter Dolichenus.¹⁶ Also in this case, elements suggestive of various cultural traditions were made into a composite novelty that even successfully developed into imperial religion or *Reichsreligion*. In a similar vein, the invention of the *dexiosis* reliefs – with the heads of the figures in profile while the torsos are displayed frontally – has been suggested to be a first step towards the “hieratic frontality” characterising later developments in Syrian sculpture.¹⁷ If we can really characterise the Antiochan idea of a pantheon, Mithras, Iupiter Dolichenus and the semi-frontal *dexiosis* reliefs as Commagenean inventions that were catalysts for further developments, this would suggest that the area was a privileged place for *synthesis* and *composition* indeed. Against this background the genesis of the Antiochan style becomes even more understandable.¹⁸ Commagene then was a late Hellenistic laboratory for innovation by bricolage just as were Alexandria, Rome and Antioch.

This book has not tried to understand Antiochan Commagene from the inside, but rather from the outside. Such an exploration is particularly necessary because most general literature has neglected this important piece of (archaeological) evidence. The large bibliography on the *Kommagene-Forschung* proper is not matched by attention from wider debates. As already mentioned in 1.1, it is striking to note that Commagene is not mentioned at all in the *Cambridge companion to the*

¹³ I owe this important observation to Jaś Elsner. See already Schütte-Maischatz/Winter 2004b.

¹⁴ Thomas 2004; followed by La Rocca 2015, 72.

¹⁵ Beck 1998, 115–128. See now also Beck 2004 and Beck 2007.

¹⁶ For which see now Blömer/Winter 2012. For further information and references, see 2.3 sv. Doliche.

¹⁷ Kropp 2013, 362. For these later developments see now Blömer 2014.

¹⁸ For such a view on the development of culture whereby “peripheries” or “frontier regions” would, in fact, constitute the most dynamic and innovative factors, see McNeill 1992. For the role of material culture with these processes, in particular, see Maran 2012, 59–66.

Hellenistic world from 2006, and is largely absent from the 2003 *Blackwell companion to the Hellenistic world*, in which it is only three times referred to and in a rather superficial manner.¹⁹ These references are all in regard to Roman political aspects – characterising Commagene as a buffer state – and religious aspects: the usual suspects from the last century. The only really interpretative remark comes from Angelos Chaniotis, who characterises Commagene as “at the periphery of the Hellenistic world.”²⁰ In the 2003 edition of the handbook *Hellenistic civilisation* by François Chamoux, what happened in Commagene can even be seen characterised as “the deep-rooted Hellenization of a small state lost in the hinterland.”²¹ In a volume on Petra from the same year, Andrew Stewart qualifies Nemrud Dağ as “bombastic and coarse” when compared to the Khazneh.²²

These kinds of remarks characterise current thinking on Antiochan Commagene and underline once more the need for the generalising, conceptual approach that this study has adopted. Much remains to be explored in detail. It is only possible, however, to engage in these in-depth discussions when the framework to understand them has been properly defined. It has been the purpose of this book to establish this general framework. It has shown that what happened in first-century BC Commagene was in many regards exemplary of socio-cultural developments in the Hellenistic world. What Antiochos I did in terms of ideology and canon building fits the practice of Hellenistic kingship in the period very well. Moreover, the way in which he tried to materialise his ideas by a process of bricolage is exemplary for the process of innovative eclecticism that characterised large parts of the Hellenistic world in the first century BC, from the Oxus to the Atlantic. The purpose of this study, therefore, has explicitly *not* been to try and “domesticate” Antiochan Commagene by showing how typically (late) Hellenistic it was; on the contrary.²³ Demonstrating how exemplary Commagene was of socio-cultural developments in the global (late) Hellenistic world served to show what kind of laboratory for innovation by bricolage it really was and what role it played in constituting the (Eurasian) world around it.

¹⁹ See 1.1.

²⁰ Chaniotis 2003, 444. One also notes the absence of Commagene in overviews on Hellenistic sculpture like Vorster 2007.

²¹ Chamoux 2003, 151. Cf. Versluis 2014b/c.

²² Stewart 2003, 198. In structural terms of innovative eclecticism and bricolage the Khazneh is very much like the Antiochan project, as becomes perfectly clear from its description and analysis in Kropp 2013, 199–205.

²³ As Schipperheijn 2011 did. For this important critique see De Jong 2017.

It has also shown that much remains to be done. A systematic comparison of the programme of Antiochos I with that of other first-century BC Hellenistic monarchs will help to better determine his place, role and originality.²⁴ I think that also and perhaps especially the figure and model of Mithridates of Pontus will prove to be of great importance in this respect.²⁵ It is also important to chart the different traditions that Antiochos I invented and used for his self-definition more in detail. Moreover, the bricolage of his innovative eclecticism should be analysed more in depth through a comparison with a wider selection of relevant similarities. But it is only possible to study these and approach many other questions, now that their relevance has been established.

²⁴ Although I thus strongly disagree with Kropp (*Kropp 2013*) that what we have in Commagene would be “too idiosyncratic and far removed from regional trends and traditions” (87), his book provides an excellent starting point for such a comparative exercise.

²⁵ For whom in general see *Mayor 2010*. To give but some examples mentioned in that book: Mithridates used an astrological feature (in his case a comet) as an important part of his self-presentation (31); Mithridates traced his father’s bloodline to Persian kings and his mother’s family to Alexander the Great (37, 162); Mithridates takes Herakles as a role model and tutelary deity (63); Mithridates is said to have inherited antique furniture from Darius (67); Mithridates renamed one of his own sons with the traditional name of ancient Paphlagonian kings (Pylaemenes) (129); Mithridates revived the ancient Persian title “satrap” for his governors in Phrygia (154); and Mithridates would have organised Persian-Macedonian-style banquets (233). See also the conclusion to 4.2 above.

Appendix: Antiochos' *Nomos*: Translation

This Appendix presents an English translation of the great cult inscription or *nomos* from Nemrud Dağ as it is incised in Greek on the backs of the throne bases of the colossal statues on the East and West terraces. For remarks on the context, content and meaning of this inscription, see 2.3 and 3.1.

The transcription of the *nomos* and this translation were made by Friedrich Karl Dörner, finalised in 1991 and eventually published in *Goell/Sanders*, 206–217. For the English translation Dörner acknowledges the assistance of his Oxford colleague Peter M. Fraser.

I am most grateful to Eisenbrauns Publishers for their permission to use Dörner's translation in this book.

Translation of the *Nomos* Inscription

I. Introduction

1. *Significance and purpose of the inscription*

The Great King Antiochos, the God, the Righteous One, the Manifest [Deity], the Friend of the Romans and the Greeks, the son of King Mithridates Callinicus and of Laodice the Brother-loving Goddess, the Daughter of King Antiochos Epiphanus, the Mother-loving, the Victorious, has recorded for all time, on consecrated pedestals, with inviolable letters the deeds of his clemency.

2. *Piety – the most secure possession for mankind*

I have come to believe that, for mankind, of all good things piety is both the most secure (11)

possession and also the sweetest enjoyment. This judgement became, for me, the cause of fortunate power and its blessed use; and during my whole life I have appeared to all men as one who thought holiness the most secure guardian and the unrivalled delight of my reign [or kingdom]. By this means

I have, contrary to all expectations, escaped great perils, have easily become master of hopeless situations, and in a blessed way have attained to the fullness of a long life.

3. *Commagene – common dwelling place of all the gods*

After taking over my father's dominion, I announced, in the piety of my thought, that the (24)

kingdom subject to my throne should be the common dwelling place of all the gods, in that by means of every kind of art I decorated the representations of their form, as the ancient lore of Persians and of Greeks – the fortunate roots of my ancestry – had handed them down [to us], and honoured them with sacrifices and festivals, as was the primitive rule and the common custom of all mankind; in addition my own just consideration has further devised still other and especially brilliant honours.

II. Significance and Purpose of the Hierothesion

1. *The hierothesion – not only a tomb but a place of pious veneration of the gods and the deified royal ancestors*

And I have taken forethought to lay the foundation of this sacred tomb, which is to be (36)

indestructible by the ravages of time, in closest proximity to the heavenly throne, wherein the fortunately preserved outer form of my person, preserved to ripe old age, shall, after the soul beloved by God has been sent to the heavenly thrones of Zeus-Oromasdes, rest through immeasurable time so I chose to make this holy place a common consecrated seat of all the gods; so that not only the heroic company of my ancestors, whom you behold before you, might be set up here by my pious devotion, but also that the divine representation of the manifest deities might be consecrated on the holy hill and that this place might likewise not be lacking in witness to my piety.

2. *The erection of divine images and the establishment of the new Tyche*

Therefore, as you see, I have set up these divine images of Zeus-Oromasdes and of (53)

Apollo-Mithras-Helios-Hermes and of Artagnes-Herakles-Ares, and also of my all-nourishing homeland Commagene; and from one and the same quarry,

throned likewise among the deities who hear our prayers, I have consecrated the features of my own form, and have caused the ancient honour of great deities to become the coeval of a new Tyche. Since I thereby, in an upright way, imitated the example of the divine Providence, which as a benevolent helper has so often been standing by my side in the struggles of my reign.

3. *The organisation of the cult and its revenues*

Adequate property in land and an alienable income therefrom have I set aside for the (67)

ample provision of sacrifices; an unceasing cult and chosen priests arrayed in such vestments as are proper to the race of the Persians have I inaugurated, and I have dedicated the whole array and cult in a manner worthy of my fortune and the majesty of the gods. I have decreed the appropriate laws to govern the sacred observances thus established for everlasting, so that all the inhabitants of my realm may offer both the ancient sacrifices, required by age-old common custom, and also new festivals in honour of the gods and in my honour. The birthday of my natural body, the sixteenth of Audnaios, and the tenth of Loos, the day of my accession to the throne, I have consecrated to the manifestation of the great deities, who were my guides in a prosperous beginning and have been the source of universal blessings for my whole kingdom. Because of the multitude of offerings and the magnificence of the celebration I have consecrated two additional days, each of them as an annual festival. The population of my empire I have divided up for the purpose of these assemblies, festival gatherings, and sacrifices, and directed them to repair by villages and cities to the nearest sanctuaries, whichever is the most conveniently located for the festival observance. Moreover, I have appointed under the same title that, in addition to the observance just named, my birth on the sixteenth and my accession on the tenth shall be observed every month by the priests.

4. *The proclamation of the Holy Law*

Now that these regulations have been established, to be observed continually as the (105)

pious duty of men of understanding, not only in my honour but also in the blessed hope of their own good fortune, I have, in obedience to the inspiration of the gods, ordered to be inscribed upon sacred, inviolable stelae a holy law, which shall be binding upon all generations of mankind who in the immeasurable course of time, through their special lot in life,

shall successively be destined to dwell in this land; they must observe it without violation, knowing that the stern penalty of the deified royal ancestors will pursue equally the impiety occasioned by neglect as that occasioned by folly, and that disregard of the law decreed for the honour of the heroes brings with it inexorable penalties. For the pious it is all a simple matter, but godlessness is followed by backbreaking burdens. This law my voice has proclaimed, but it is the mind of the gods that has given it authority.

III. The Holy Law

1. *Appointment, duties and obligations of the priests*

- (a) Exclusive service in the hierothesion; care and adornment of the sacred images

Law

The priest who is appointed by me for these gods and heroes, whom I have dedicated at (124)

the sacred tomb of my body, on the topmost ridges of the Taurus range, and who shall at a later time hold this office, he, set free from every other duty, shall without let or hindrance and with no excuse for invasion keep watch at this memorial and devote himself to the care and the proper adornment of these sacred images.

- (b) Birthdays of the king as festivals and their financing, duties of the priest guests to be invited

On the birthdays which I have established forever as monthly and annual festivals of (132)

the gods and of my own person, throughout the whole year he shall, himself decently garbed in Persian raiment, as my benefaction and the ancestral custom of our race have provided, crown them all with the gold crowns which I have dedicated as the sacred honours due the deified ancestors; and out of the income from the villages, which I have designated for the sacred honours of the heroic race, he shall offer on these altars rich additional offerings of incense and aromatic herbs, and also splendid sacrifices in honour of the gods and in my honour, in worthy wise setting up sacred tables with appropriate foods and filling jars from the winepress with precious drink (that is, wine mixed with water). He shall hospitably welcome the whole of the assembled people, both the native and the foreigners who stream hither, and he shall provide for the common

enjoyment of the feast by the assembled multitudes, in that, as is the custom, he shall take for himself a portion, as a gift in honour of the priestly office, and distribute the rest of my benefaction to the others for their free enjoyment, so that during the holy days everyone may receive a never failing sustenance and may thus be able to celebrate the festivals without running the risk of malicious calumny. The drinking cups, which I have dedicated, are to be used by them as long as they remain in the holy place and participate in the general assembly for the feast.

2. *The musicians in the hierothesion, their rank, and protection for them and their descendants*

The group of musicians whom I have chosen for the purpose and those who may later (161)

be consecrates, their sons and daughters, and also their descendants shall all learn the same art and be set free from the burden of every other responsibility; and they are to devote themselves to the observances which I have established to the end, and without any evasion are to continue their services as long as the assembly requests it. No one, no king or ruler, no priest or official shall ever make slaves of these hierodules, whom I have, in accordance with the divine will, consecrated to the gods and to my own honours, or their children or the descendants of their children, who shall continue their family to all later time; he shall neither enslave them to himself nor alienate them to anyone else in any way, nor injure one of them, nor deprive him of this ministry; but the priests shall take care of them, and the kings, officials and all private persons shall stand by them, and the favour of the gods and heroes will be laid up for them as a reward of their piety.

IV. **Provisions for the Continuation of the Cult in the Hierothesion**

1. *Interdiction of any alterations in the status of the hierothesion or its property and threat of punishment*

It is equally not permitted for anyone to appropriate or to alienate the villages which I (191)

have dedicated to these gods, to sell them or to devote them to some other purpose, or in any way injure those villages; or to reduce the income from them, which I have dedicated to the gods as an inviolable possession.

Nor shall anyone go unpunished who shall devise in his mind against our honour some other scheme of violence or of disparaging or suspending the sacrifices and festal assemblies which I have established. Whoever shall presume to rescind or to injure or guilefully to misinterpret the just tenor of this regulation or the heroic honours which an immortal judgement has sanctioned, him the wrath of the daemons and of all the gods shall pursue, both himself and his descendants, irreconcilably, with every kind of punishment.

2. *The hierothesion as an example of piety for children and grandchildren*

A noble example of piety, which it is a sacred duty to offer to gods and ancestors, I (212)

have set before the eyes of my children and grandchildren, as through many others, so too through this work; and I believe that they will emulate this fair example by continually increasing the honours appropriate to their line and, like me, in their riper years adding greatly to their personal fame.

3. *Favour of the deified ancestors and the gods for descendants who observe the law*

For those who do so I pray that all the ancestral gods, from Persia and Macedonia and (232)

from the native hearth of Commagene, may continue to be gracious to them in all clemency. And whoever, in the long time to come, takes over this reign as king or dynast, may he, if he observes this law and guards my honour, enjoy, through my intercession, the favour of the deified ancestors and all the gods. But if he, in his folly of mind, undertakes measures contrary to the honour of the gods, may he, even without my curse, suffer the full wrath of the gods.

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